



Making the Case for Workplace Well-being in K-12 Education

How school, school district & stakeholder leaders can achieve more buy-in for greater investment in teacher and principal well-being



Presenters



Paul McArthur
Knowledge Manager
McConnell Foundation



André Rebeiz
Research Manager
Edcan Network



Tovah Paglaro
COO
Avalanche Strategy



Background

McConnell Foundation & WellAhead



McConnell Foundation: A private foundation that works across Canada on systemic social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges. Through granting and investing, convening, and co-creation with grantees, partners and the public we use social innovation help build a more innovative, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient society.

WellAhead:

- The Foundation's initiative in child and youth mental health
- Focus on systems change: integrating social and emotional wellbeing into K-12 education
- A funder, connector and convenor that helps amplify the impact of existing work.
- Two priority areas:
 - Advancing system-wide approaches to address student wellbeing
 - Catalyzing action on workplace wellbeing in K-12 (teacher, school staff and leader wellbeing)

Why Workplace Wellbeing in K-12?

Stress impacts staff wellbeing



12-30% of Quebec teachers report experiencing burnouts



30% of Ontario principals use unhealthy coping strategies to deal with work-related stress

Staff Stress affects students



Higher levels of chronic stress



Reduced feelings of support from teachers



Lower performance on academics



Lower school satisfaction

Stress has system impacts



Teacher turnover, which is often related to stress, costs schools an estimated \$17,000/teacher



Teachers' long-term leave due to psychological distress costs \$3.4M/year in British Columbia alone

WellAhead Strategy in WWK12



Practices

- Share information on strategies and approaches to improve workplace wellbeing in K-12
- Build the evidence base for organizational approaches that can mitigate the root causes of stress

Systems and structures

- Convene a wide range of stakeholders across the country to explore how to advance this issue in Canada
- Support efforts to advance workplace wellbeing at the provincial/territorial level

Mindsets

- Explore how to better frame the issue of teacher and staff wellbeing for buy-in across stakeholder groups
- Mobilize evidence on the importance and value of teacher and staff wellbeing

WELL AT WORK

Developed by EdCan, **WELL AT WORK** calls on education leaders to commit to making workplace well-being a top priority, and encourages everyone to take responsibility in creating supportive school cultures where staff look after their well-being and that of their colleagues – every day.



Well at Work
by **EdCan**



For practical tools and resources that will help you take your first steps, visit: edcan.ca/wellatwork

WELL AT WORK AIMS TO...

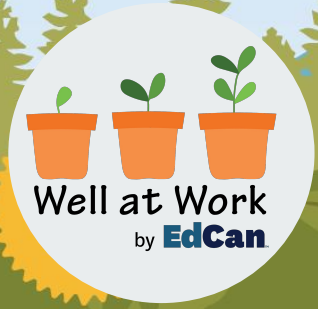
BUILD awareness and a shared understanding of the urgent need to invest in staff mental health and well-being in ways that challenge mindsets and assumptions (e.g. “educators have it easy”)

AMPLIFY educators’ stories and lived experiences that get to the heart of what well-being actually means and looks like at work

SUPPORT school districts and provinces who are seeking solutions and making workplace well-being a top priority



Well at Work
by **EdCan**



WE...

TRANSFORM groundbreaking research and evidence into personal and relatable stories that highlight the ups and downs of working in education

COLLABORATE with experts to demystify what the research says via fact sheets, infographics, podcasts, videos, and much more!

HOST national events to convene stakeholders around a common vision for workplace well-being in Canadian K-12 education



The Study

Why A Framing Study?



Understanding is frame dependent. What does this mean? It mean it's not just what you say... but how you say it. Your content knowledge matters, but it's not all that matters. If you are going to use that expertise to have an impact, you have to learn how to say what it is you have to say."

Nat Kendall-Taylor,
CEO - Frameworks Institute

Overview



Purpose: Surface ways to more effectively communicate the issue of teacher and staff wellbeing to increase buy-in.

Method: Better understand about how people both inside and outside the education system think and feel about teacher and principal wellbeing through a large-scale online survey.

Application: Leverage insights to develop and share language and issue framing(s) that would maximize traction for improving workplace wellbeing in K-12

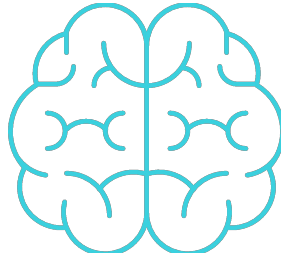


Avalanche Strategy

Approach: Deep Listening

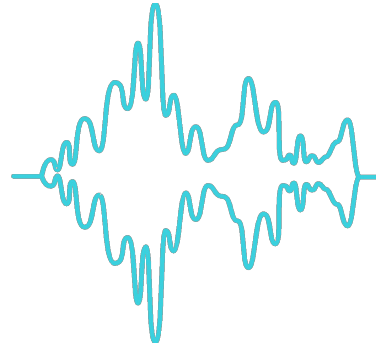
We all know:

How we **think** about things shapes how we **talk** about them



Think

- Priorities
- Values
- Emotions



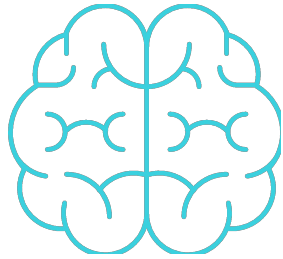
Talk

- Words
- Metaphors
- Tone



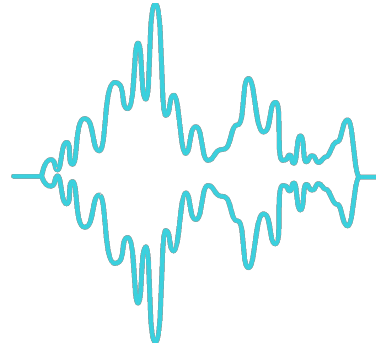
We just reverse this:

Analyze how people **talk** to understand how they **think** and **feel**



Think

- Priorities
- Values
- Emotions

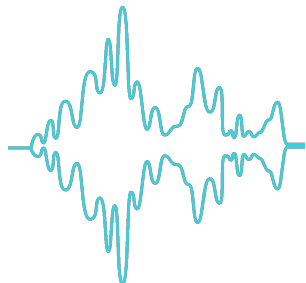


Talk

- Words
- Metaphors
- Tone



The Process



Listen

Prompt with open-ended survey



Understand

Analyze the language to reveal how they relate to the issue



Reflect

Messaging that reflects their priorities, values, emotions, and attitudes



Resonate

Mobilize the base and persuade the opposition



The Sample



Public sample (n=1202)

- Sample from AB, BC, ON
- English only
- Census representative for political ideology, race, gender, age

Educator Sample (n=450)

- Sample from AB, BC, ON
- English only
- Opt in from partner lists

Key Findings



Findings Overview



1. Stress is a more salient concept than wellbeing
2. Most agree: stress affects performance, yet not a top priority
3. People relate differently to teachers and principals
4. Presenting only facts has limited influence: stories are more effective



1. Stress is a more salient concept than wellbeing

Respondents were asked 'what would you think if you were told...

'Teachers (or principals) have a lot of stress?

AND

'We need to improve teacher (or principal) wellbeing?

Stress is More Salient than Wellbeing for Educators



Educators and public samples both express more support, less reservation and more understanding in reaction to the stress framing.

- **Educators** express more support and less reservations than the public, to the stress statement.

Definitions:

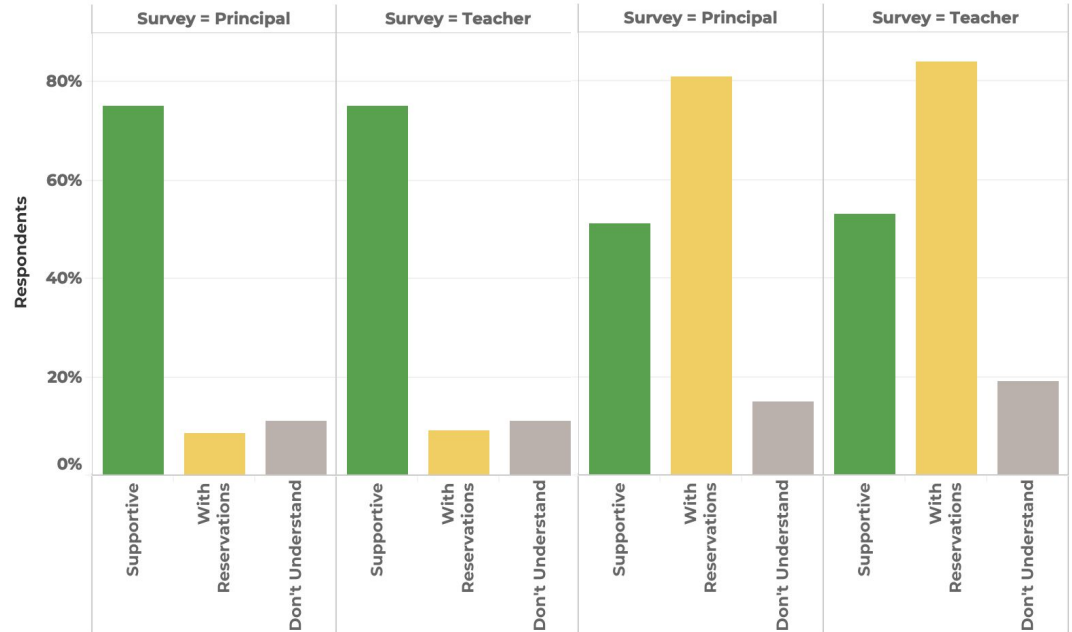
Supportive: simple agreement

With reservations: tepid, conditional or wavering support

Don't understand: unclear about what the problem is that needs to be fixed



Stress Framing



Making it Real: Wellbeing vs Stress



Wellbeing

*Would they be happier or less stressed or what?
What is "wellbeing " defined as?*

*I'm not sure specifically how you define wellbeing.
But if you interpret it to mean that teachers will be
supported in how they deal with children, then that
sounds good.*

*We all would benefit from improving wellbeing, and
for teachers in particular as it relates to their ability
to connect with students on a regular basis*

Stress

*Definitely agree, so much is expected & teachers are
not given the resources needed*

*It must be increasing because of problem students,
high workload, increases in class size, threats of layoffs
etc.*


*I agree. Less stress is key to job performance - and in
this case to kids learning*

*Determine the causes, decide what's acceptable, and
how to keep stress at a manageable level.*



Framing Recommendation

Frame educator stress as a challenge that negatively impacts job performance; and measures to address this as positively impacting student outcomes. Avoid vague references to wellbeing.



2. Most agree: Stress affects performance, yet not a top priority

Participants were asked *'how much do you believe the quality of K-12 education would be improved by reducing the stress of teachers (or principals) and investing in their wellbeing?'*

- Most agreed that reducing stress would improve the quality of K-12 education.
- Educators were much more likely to believe this to be true.

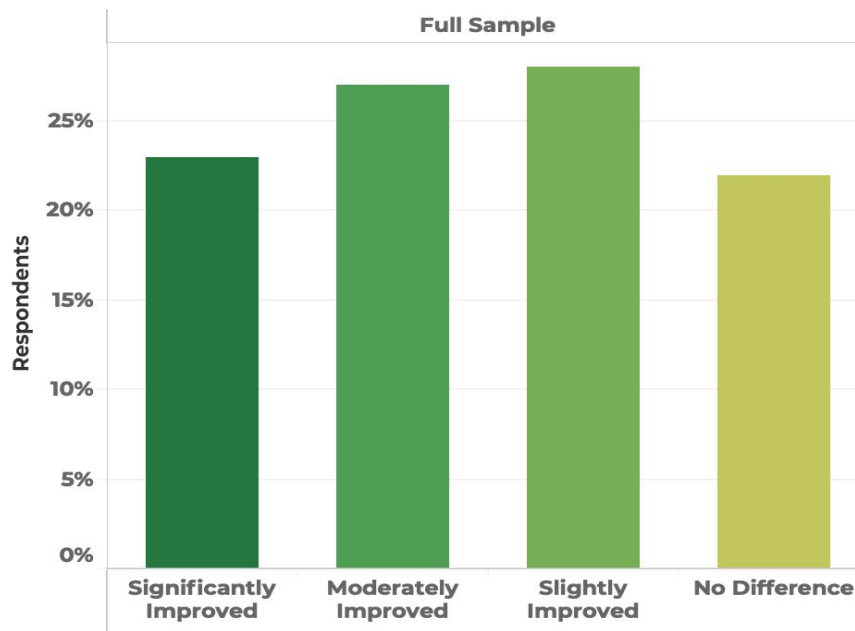
Most agree: reducing stress improves performance

“How much do you believe that the quality of kindergarten to grade 12 education would be IMPROVED by reducing teacher stress and investing in the wellbeing of teachers?”

Most people believe that reducing stress has a positive impact.

However:

- **Only 23% of respondents believe** reducing teacher stress would significantly improve the quality of education.
- **The majority believe** it would slightly or moderately improve the quality of education



Time/resources Top Priorities for Quality Education

“What do you think is the GREATEST CHALLENGE that keeps teachers from doing their best work?”

Time+Resources: includes class sizes, funding and one on one time

The Kids: references to kids behaviour, restrictions to discipline and parents

The Politics: references to unions, bureaucracy, boards and administration

Teachers: references to educator’s skills, motivation and attitude

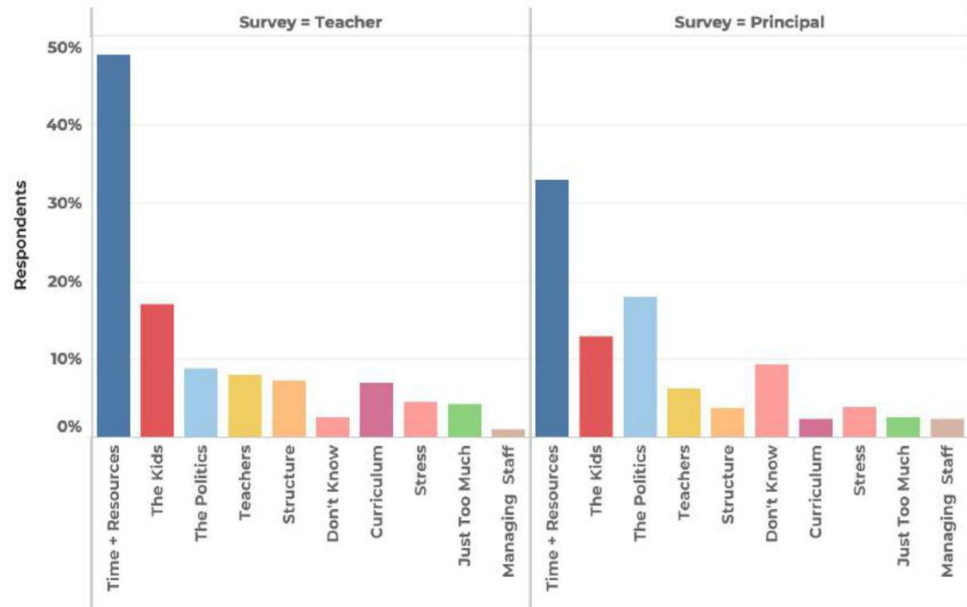
Structure: including pay & accountability

Curriculum: the curriculum is the problem

Stress: stress is the greatest challenge

Just too much: expectations, lack of downtime and too much to do

Managing Staff: principals are managers



Most Prominent Emotions: Worry, Sadness and Ambivalence

“What emotion BEST describes the way you FEEL, about the challenges teachers/principals face at work and in the classroom?”

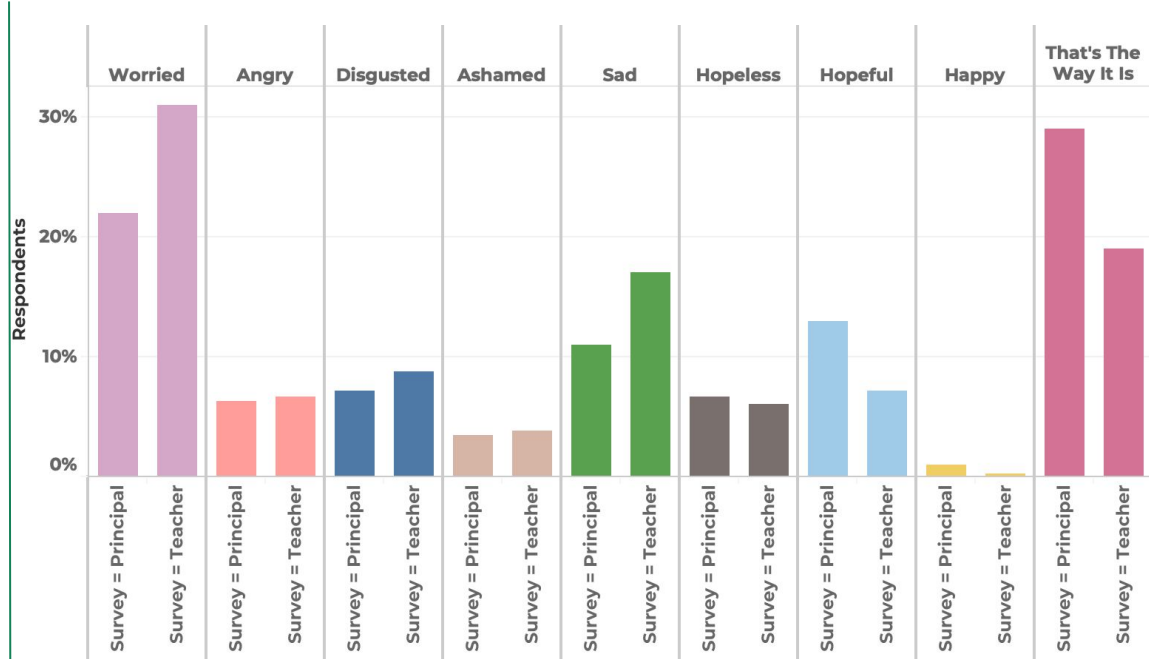
Sadness and worry are the dominant emotions, followed by ambivalence. This points to the need for agitation and hope.

Relating to teachers:

- Worry is the leading emotion (31%)
- Nearly equal levels of sadness (16%) and ambivalence (19%)

Relating to principals:

- Ambivalence is leading emotion (29%)
- Followed by worry (21%)
- Double the amount of hope (12%) compared to teachers, and more hope than sadness (11%)





Framing Recommendation

People generally believe that stress and wellbeing have an impact on the quality of education. But they also believe there are more pressing priorities

Frame initiatives to reduce teacher stress as complementary and connected to the issues that are perceived as the greatest challenges in education - time, resources & classroom behaviour.

High levels of worry, sadness and ambivalence about the challenges faced by principals and teachers point the importance of telling stories that inspire agitation and hope. Communicate the positive impact of addressing the challenges and inspire hope and engagement.



3. People relate differently to teachers and principals

Surveys were randomly assigned to frame questions about teachers OR principals

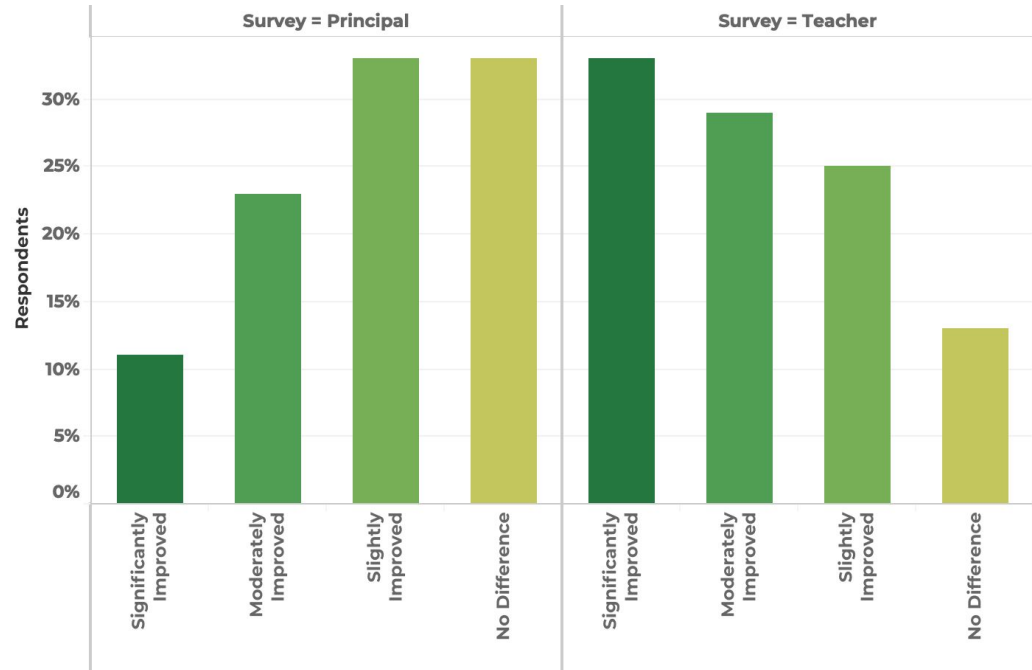
- Many analyses indicated differences in responses on teachers and principals
- Builds on findings of Frameworks Institute study in the US. When the public think about education they think more about the ‘tangible triad’: *teachers, parents, students*¹

¹[Frameworks Institute: K-12 Teacher Quality and Teachers Unions](#)

Public Beliefs about impact on of reducing stress

Among the public sample there are significant perceived differences in the impact of reducing teacher or principal stress.

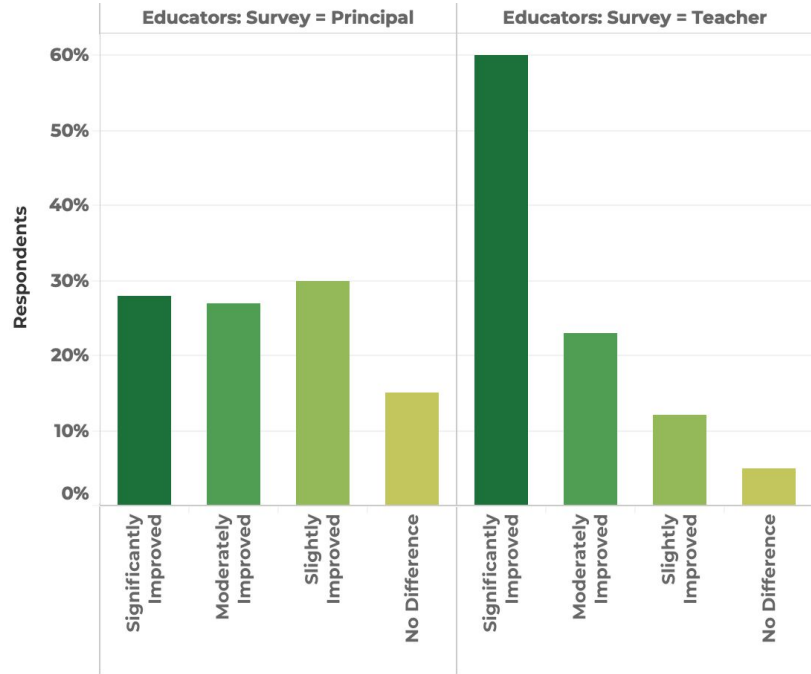
- **Principal:** 11% of respondents believe reducing principal stress & investing in wellbeing will significantly improve the quality of education
- **Teacher:** 33% of respondents believe reducing teacher stress & investing in wellbeing will significantly improve the quality of education



Educator Beliefs about impact on of reducing stress

Among the educator sample the contrast is also stark:

- **Principal:** nearly 30% believe it will have a significant, moderate or slight improvement respectively
- **Teacher:** 60% believe reducing teacher stress will significantly improve education, another 22% report moderate improvement.





Framing Recommendation

The public have a limited understanding of the role of the principal, and believe that reducing teachers' stress will have a larger impact than principals'.

When communicating about educator stress reduction or wellbeing initiatives, lead with the connection between **teacher** stress and student success.

If you're communicating about principals, be clear on the role that they play to support educators and students. Don't assume the audience knows what principals' roles look like.



4. Presenting only facts has limited influence: stories are more effective

Participants responded to a question on the impact of stress on quality education before and after the following statistics were presented to them:

Finding about teachers:

Research says that teachers experience as much stress as paramedics and police officers, and that up to 30% of Canadian teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years largely due to workload and the stress of the job. What emotion BEST describes the way you FEEL when you read this finding?

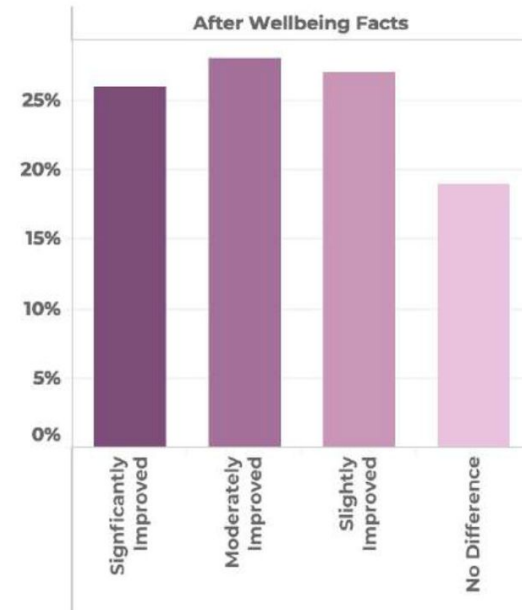
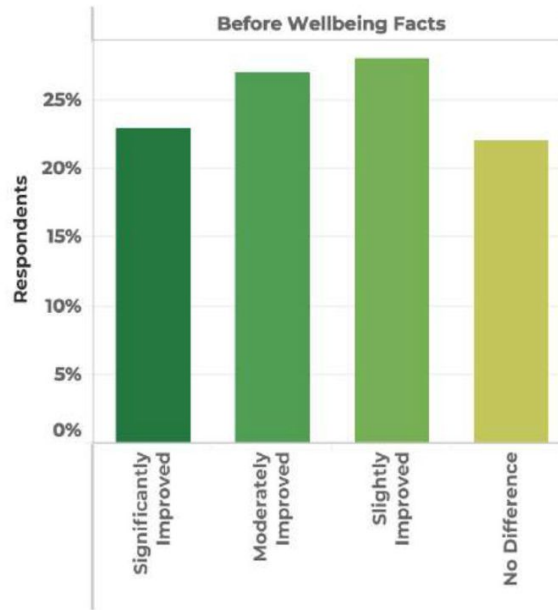
Finding about principals:

Research says school principals experience stress at a rate 1.7 times higher than the rest of the population, leading to burnout, mental health problems, and increased turnover.

Facts didn't significantly influence perceptions

"Having read this finding, how much do you believe that the quality of kindergarten to grade 12 education would be IMPROVED by reducing teacher stress and investing in the wellbeing of teachers?"

Across the whole sample, on average, there is little evidence that the findings effectively shifted position about the impact of reducing teacher stress and investing in teacher wellbeing on the quality of education.

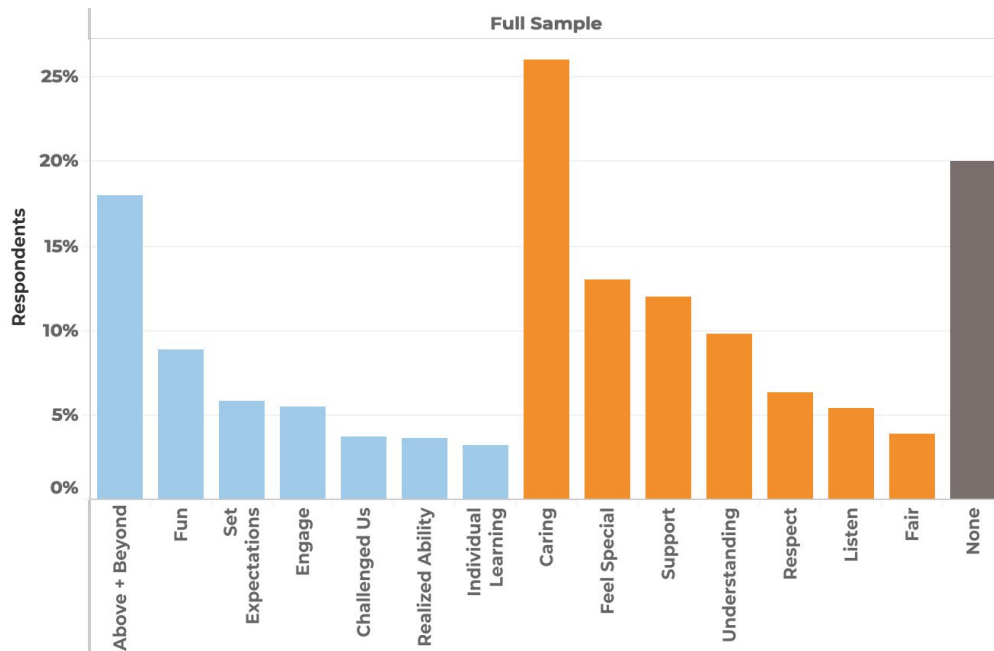


Teachers are valued for dedication and care

“Tell us about the best kindergarten to grade 12 TEACHER or PRINCIPAL you ever knew; what made them so great?”

While facts don't elicit strong responses, stories about the unique attributes valued by teachers suggest a different path:

- Respondents talk about being **taught well** and **treated well** by their favourite teacher
- Respondents talk about how these attributes, in combination, are key to enabling them as students to discover their own potential





Framing Recommendation

Tell stories, and support with facts. Leading with facts raises defenses and lacks empathy

- Connect teacher stress to inhibiting the educator qualities we value most (e.g. going above and beyond for students, bringing out the potential of each child, acting from a place of care)
- Connect these stories to the greatest perceived barriers to quality education (e.g. time/ resources, student behaviour/discipline)

Framing Recommendations: Summary

Insight	Recommendation
<p>Stress is a more salient concept than wellbeing</p>	<p><i>Frame educator stress as a challenge that negatively impacts job performance; and measures to address this as positively impacting student outcomes. Avoid vague references to wellbeing.</i></p>
<p>Most agree: stress affects performance, yet not a top priority</p>	<p><i>Connect initiatives to reduce teacher stress to top priorities in education; Communicate the positive impact of addressing the challenges and inspire hope and engagement</i></p>
<p>People relate differently to teachers and principals</p>	<p><i>Lead with teachers as the key target for wellbeing efforts; Communicate the role of principals in supporting teachers and students</i></p>
<p>Presenting only facts has limited influence: stories are more effective</p>	<p><i>Communicate using stories of how educator stress impacts students, support stories with facts; Communicate how too much stress prevents educators from embodying the qualities we value most in educators</i></p>

Staying on course

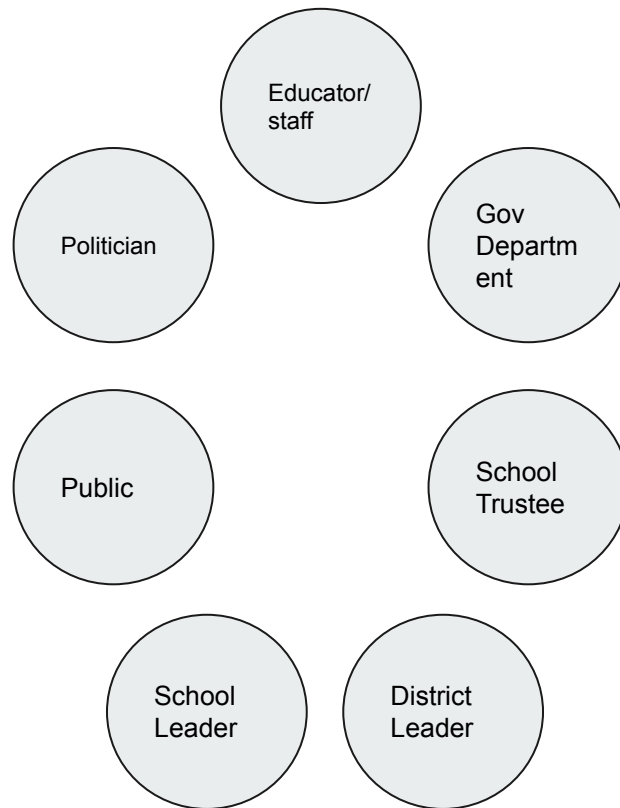


The study results suggest the following strategies to limit blowback:

- DO message about the societal importance of good teachers, but DON'T compare their stress to other helping professions (e.g. first responders)
- DON'T frame the issue as being about 'LESS WORK', but rather about enabling teachers to do their BEST work
- DO frame workplace wellbeing initiatives as being complementary to those that are addressing the most pressing issues in education, DON'T let them be seen as competing with those other priority issues

Now you try

- Identify an audience you'd like to reach with messaging around teacher and staff wellbeing
- How will you talk to them about it?





Questions?