



June 2021 Preliminary Analysis: "Team-Care Successes and Challenges in Washington, D.C. Schools"

Nonprofit Wellness conducted a study between March-June 2021, utilizing both surveys and interviews to understand educators' perspectives on self-care and team-care in all eight wards of Washington D.C.

Much gratitude to the school staff and leaders who participated in the (anonymous) surveys and interviews so far; preliminary findings are now available in this brief report, which outlines successes, challenges and our Nonprofit Wellness recommendations and materials. Our intent is to share helpful findings and actionable ideas as school administrators are making wellness plans for 2021-22.

Here is the outline of this preliminary report (we welcome continued survey collections in D.C. until June 30; our final report will be released by MPH students from GWU in July 2021):

I. Successes (for Inspiration)

- Staff Doing Activities Together Builds Empathy and Camaraderie
- Wellness Committees or Teams Can Help Plan Activities
- Therapy for School Staff is Key
- Creating Wellness Conversations Spurs Empathy and Openness
- Strategic Scheduling and Staffing Frees Time for Self-care

II. Challenges and Barriers (as Learnings)

- Unused Health and Wellness Resources
- Educators Don't Trust Non-educators
- Superficial or Non-existent Wellness Solutions
- Retention is Difficult; Turnover Looms
- Lack of Money (and time)
- Relationship Building Between Staff is a Challenge (esp. virtually)

III. Nonprofit Wellness Recommendations (to Consider)

- Train-the-Trainer and other live group sessions
- Wellness Committees
- Better benefits packages
- Tools, tips and lists

I. Successes (For Inspiration)

(1) Staff Doing Activities Together Builds Empathy and Camaraderie.

Staff and wellness committees can organize physical and social activities that build individual well-being skills AND better team relationships. Here are some examples of what schools are doing that the staff enjoy:

- “We used to do virtual zumba for our teachers - that had a pretty good turnout.”
- “for those after hours events I noticed teachers are more likely to go, not if it's an info session, more like if it's an activity.”
- "There's weekly yoga, culture committee, happy hours, everything's virtual.”
- “they actually have an Instagram page for our staff members giving [wellness] tips”
- "staff workout Wednesday”
- “Wellness days, opportunities to meet with counselors who are primarily there for students, wellness opportunities through health plan, opportunities to meet with financial advisors, social club.”
- "I was like hell yeah, that's great, so now we might do a hiking club. I would never have thought of that, so it was a good one in terms of idea-sharing.
- "Spanish language yoga, since the majority of our staff are native Spanish speakers.”
- "We did two weeks of a 6 a.m. live "Stretch and Breathe" short class, held on the school's Facebook page, then the recording stayed up there all day for teachers, families, and students to use.”
- “e-mail about stuff like doing neck stretches or lighting candles once a week”
- “Counselors are available to meet with staff; weekly yoga sessions”
- "So Friday is our first happy hour, we're going to try once a month for the rest of the year. And to try to get people together.”

(2) Wellness Committees or Teams Can Help Plan Activities

Even though wellness committees are required in D.C. by the Healthy Schools Act, many schools do not have them. Leaders that do foster a wellness team reap rewards:

- “Wednesday Wellness session for teachers led by mental health team”
- “We have a wellness team, led by my PE teacher, my social worker and teacher leader, and they meet every week. They brainstorm, or get feedback from the staff, on things to do. Right now they're planning a sip and paint. They plan celebrations or bereavements, helping me to stay responsive to when people have a life. Yeah, but generally speaking they plan out ways for the staff to have community building, and have pressure relieving activities.”
- “7a.m. for any staff who want to join meditation with them and they host different events, in the evening time to suit, that other people whether it's a psychologist comes in to talk about self care or they had a violinist come in and just play music on request from our staff.”



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- “They have done an excellent job with COVID safety. XX is wonderful providing healthy meals, so very appreciated. We have a tight knit supportive community & they do things to foster community and team building.”
- “It is nice when they have discounts to extend -- to hotels, trips, gyms, stores, theme parks, tickets to events, on-site exercise, occasional chair massage, or any well being activity or function at a discount. I like when they offer appointments for budget and finance (not always enough appts available).”
- “our mental health team put together stress management and self-care tips during the pandemic for our teachers”

(3) Therapy for School Staff and Leaders is Key

Many school leaders tried to normalize therapy and make sure their school insurance offered some form of (licensed, consistent) therapy for teachers.

- “this year, they interviewed 15 staff members, every single person said that the therapy that we’re doing is the most important thing that matters.”
- “it’s sort of like the employee assistance program. You know, we’ve referred several people to it this year, it’s 12 free sessions with a licensed psychologists or psychiatrists, you know, and, it’s tough, they will come back to me saying, Thank you, I needed that to know that I wasn’t the only one feeling this way. And to just have someone who wasn’t directly engaged with me to talk to me.”
- “We have a partnership with XX that has a clinical psychologist with us on Wednesdays and Fridays. She does direct therapy with staff, they sign up anonymously, they have sessions with her, or they can have a shorter length consult with her, and everyone has loved that.”
- School leader says they need “Access to therapy that isn’t a labyrinth of dead end phone calls and emails”
- “My mental health is a little better since I decided to seek out therapy this fall. I honestly don’t think I would have made it through the school year without that. My physical health has deteriorated significantly this year, between the increased amount of seated screen time and the extreme demands on me while I’m still (trying to) recovering from a brain injury.”
- “I think that my personal wellness involves a lot of self forgiveness”
- “on-site counselor/social worker, and mental health days are encouraged.”
- “Audre Lorde therapy group, and it’s been amazing.”
- “I have a very healthy and broad group of accountability partners. We have a therapist at the school who I use. And then I have probably three coaches. And these are all people who I have deep personal relationships with. Folks who I can call and talk to at any given time about whatever is on my mind or in my heart. And I think that I’m constantly on some mission to change, to be stronger.”



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- “Bringing the therapists in and saying everybody gets it [therapy]. And I'm doing it, and having people come out and say, Oh, my God, my life is so much better. Thank you so much for forcing me to do it. All the slots are gone...”

(4) Creating Wellness Conversations Spurs Empathy and Openness

Talking more openly about mental and physical health spurs the sharing of health goals, commonalities, concerns and challenges. This vulnerability builds empathy and trust:

- “...we help people if they are trying to figure out, well, how do I achieve my wellness goal? We have someone that can support you to develop that. But our principal checks in with all staff every week, and I check in with the school leaders, the principal and Director of Operations every week. We look at our UI, see where you are, we talk about your goals, professional goals, and then think about Okay, how are you doing on your wellness goals? And what do you need? Oh, you achieved that goal? Woohoo, let's go! Do you want to set a new goal?”
- “We try to tap into our staff as much as we can to find out what interests them, what makes them feel better. ... Of course, there's a lot of conversations that are held where we try to make it very clear, we're listening and closing the feedback loop saying we heard you and here are some of the things that we're going to try to implement to address these things.”
- “we still do what we call coffee with [E.D.], once a month, where anybody can come and say anything they want.”
- “We remind them constantly of it [wellness].”
- “making sure that our staff knew that we were thinking about them as people not just as workers.”
- “Open communication between staff and leadership, walk-by check-ins”
- “individualized check ins, there's wellness checks built into our PD”
- “And we changed our infrastructure for this year, everyone was about growth, as opposed to absolute performance scores. And I think that that also signal to staff, that, yes, we want to support you in getting better, but we know that this is a super crazy year”
- “we try to cultivate a really positive community and culture. So that could be just as simple as being kind to one another, like, when you walk in, the security guard is lovely and the front office person is lovely, or whoever's doing greetings duty which is a responsibility that shifts between people. You're greeted with a big smile. I think that's palpable and that helps it be a place you'd want to work at.”
- “the school wellness statement... it says, 'we take care of ourselves. We create space for us to listen and to respond to our physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental needs. We support each other when we need to attend to our physical, emotional, spiritual and mental needs... we unpack our own source of trauma in order to support our community unpacking their social trauma. We are getting free by getting well.’”



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(5) Strategic Scheduling and Staffing Frees Time for Self-care

Pro-actively naming time for wellness can incentivize healthy activities, plus, creative HR solutions give people more room to breathe each day.

- “Wellness Wednesday each month that, you know, folks use the time how they want to use it. It’s not a mandate that says, like, you got to go to yoga, it’s just more like, you’re gonna have this time, every month, and it’s already been calendered, where you can have that time to take care of yourself.”
- “This year, I finally have the admin team that makes sense and that allows for me to have a little bit of self care in that I have an operations manager and assistant principal and a coach. And so while we’re hybrid we have scheduled our week such that each of us can do one day working off site.”
- “the best kind of, like, self care incentive we can give our teachers is hey we’re ending PD at 2pm, two hours early you go do what you want for the rest of time and that’s what they’re most happy about.”
- “Asynchronous days. Wellness and development days.”
- “[We] would still get on them [teachers] it’s like hey, you don’t need to send this email at midnight, you know, we want our teachers to practice that sense of life work balance, and we need our leaders to do that as well... they’re just so used to still having to work after hours.”
- "But generally, I probably work too late, work every weekend. Don't model self care and I, as I've been talking a lot with my teachers about teacher wellness and self care I'm realizing that. So I will now adjust myself and, like, not press send if it's nine o'clock on the email because that, like, connotes that it's okay to be emailing at night and stuff. I'll, like, save it for the next morning. Or, you know, scheduling meetings thinking about people and their lives outside of school so that I'm modeling better what does not come naturally to me."
- “We have attached a person to every classroom, so that any lead teacher has either a long term teacher's assistant or a behavior tech that's with them all the time, and that was to enable breaks.”



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II. Challenges and Barriers (Learnings)

(1) Unused Health and Wellness Resources

Many schools offer benefits and resources to staff that go unused or aren't desired:

- “We used to have the wellness program, where you know you get reduced like gym membership, all of that. It was a waste of money because our teachers weren't using it.”
- “There are once-annual "staff mini-grants" (usually \$300) provided by Kaiser Permanente, which is lovely but doesn't go very far towards changing the overall wellness culture at the school.”
- “Our teachers who are enrolled in our insurance, any of those actually we have three different insurance plans and different options. It's all 100% covered for their mental health they can get under CareFirst... And the problem is I don't know, because obviously we can't ask them, right, but I would guess that many of our teachers don't take advantage of it.”
- “We pay, you know, 80% of your health insurance at XXX, base 50%. So you get that and folks don't understand that we have, you know, emergency assistance. These are all new things we've implemented, we're helping pay off student loans for people to try.”

(2) Educators Don't Trust Non-educators

Many teachers are skeptical of mandated meetings or messengers who were not educators (and therefore don't understand school culture):

- "at the end of the day, teachers, they're gonna listen to other teachers,”
- “they are more likely to pay attention if it's another teacher”
- “if I [teachers] don't find this valuable I'm not going to be here and if I had to be here I'll sit back and roll my eyes”
- “They're very skeptical. That's how our teachers are. I just think some of them will eat it up because I know we have some teachers who are really in to self-care, mental health, peace, they'll love it. But then I have some teachers who would just be annoyed to be going through those.”
- “It's the ‘trust me,’ it's going to be vulnerable and be able to name how you feel or even be able to say, ‘I don't want to do this thing.’ That's hard for people to say: ‘I don't want to do this.’ Okay, well that's fine that you don't want to do it, but let us know. Rather than, like, stand to the side, and not want to participate.”
- “Teachers are so skeptical of any additional meeting”



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(3) Superficial or Non-existent Wellness Solutions

Some schools find that wellness isn't prioritized for the staff, or it's limited to one week per year. Also, the pandemic has thrown everything off:

- "This is my first year and it [wellness] hasn't really come up"
- "They would have like a masseuse come in like the people who do the 15-minutes chair massages or do manicures for us. Little things like that but that was always during Teacher Appreciation Week, you know. But, yeah, I can't, I can only think of superficial things like sometimes we get lunches for our teachers to show our appreciation, but nothing deeper than that."
- "distance learning has been disastrous...I now regularly work 12+ hour days in front of a computer. This leaves little time for movement, cooking, or my own emotional/social needs."

(4) Retention is Difficult; Turnover Looms

Teacher turnover is massive (twice the national average; D.C. has 25% staff and principal turnover annually) and difficult to prevent or predict:

- "turnover is going to be the Wild Wild West. It really is. As folks don't have other jobs going on. What are they going to do? I just don't know."
- "I frequently worry about whether I've sacrificed my long-term ability for the sake of heroic efforts to support my students this school year, just to be constantly told by HR that I'm not doing enough."
- "the #1 way that we are trying to retain is to give them voice in the execution of the plan that we design."
- "Having quality people stay in the career, in the position, it's going to be much more difficult. And understanding how to address that, that's the nut that needs to be cracked."

(5) Lack of Money (and Time)

As with most problems, scarcity of time and money adds to the difficulty:

- "They also have huge responsibilities serving our scholars, some things are out of our control. I can't really reduce the number of caseloads, you know, unless I hire more teachers, but I don't have the budget."
- "But when I look at their calendar and their schedule, when I look at the budget, there's not one dollar assigned to it, not one hour. And what it usually looks like is people coming back during the summer."
- "I think, you know, if money were no object or limitation I'd actually have a mental health clinician on staff for just staff."
- "But we haven't yet figured out a way that's cost effective to be able to offer that kind of support to our teachers as well"



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(6) Relationship-Building Between Staff is a Challenge (esp. virtually)

School staff and leaders have found that connecting with each other can be very difficult which can hurt mental health:

- “I feel like, you know, not everyone feels connected just yet.”
- “Because some of the conflict we’ve had when we’ve been talking about racialized identity and dismantling of white supremacy culture in our school, there’s been some misunderstandings....And people will have conflicts. Some conflicts happened because people thought someone was talking about someone when they were actually talking about the beliefs and values, or the culture itself.”
- “We have not spent any time in the building with each other, and this is stressful.”
- “Our leaders do not always practice what they preach”
- “I feel more comfortable talking with a certain coworker, not all.”
- “There’s a lot of perfectionism in our group, and a lot of trauma around relationships and, well, just trauma, right? So how to value myself and how to be with other people is a struggle.”
- “You pay so much attention to the students, the parents maybe, so we forget about our staff members.”



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III. Nonprofit Wellness RECOMMENDATIONS & RESOURCES

(1) Train-the-Trainer (& live PD Sessions) for School Staff

Nonprofit Wellness offers Professional Development sessions as well as a train-the-trainer curriculum designed for school staff. The curriculum is based on resilience and "re-framing" stress, and on the team-care approach. Nonprofit Wellness has helpful handouts and the interactive sessions focus on skill-building, brain science, and motivation/context.

- *"I love the train the trainer idea. I think that having a couple of our staff trained to lead some of the sessions, similar to what you have done, would be great. The live group sessions have been fantastic. Asynchronous online trainings, I think, would be really great too. Benefits package. I mean, they're all valuable."*
- *"[Train-the-trainer] where we get our own teachers, build them up to be leaders for self care right or mental health, and then for them to be able to tell, because at the end of the day, teachers, they're gonna listen to other teachers."*
- *"You really need a school-wide initiative ... you can't just use your PE or your social workers you need other leadership skills. If they would learn something like that in a training, I'd be interested in that."*
- *"The train-the-trainer, if you want to be somebody who can help your colleagues, here's the way to do it, we're willing to support you in that kind of thing."*

(2) Wellness Teams in Schools

While school wellness teams are required in D.C. by the Healthy Schools Act of 2010, this law is an unenforced and unfunded mandate. Section 1.2 on pages 2-3 shows how a few wellness teams already are coordinating activities and trainings for their peers. Nonprofit Wellness coaches and/or provides resources to school-based teams and committees. Through trainings, skill-shops, and thought partnering, we will help build your wellness committee so that it is woven into (and strengthening) the fabric of your resilient team(s) and whole school culture.

(3) Benefit packages

We help schools learn more about benefit options, and highlight for staff what is in their benefits packages through insurance or unions. "Benefits" examples are EAPs, gym access, free subscriptions, discounts on gear, financial counseling, and (accessible) trauma-informed therapy.

- *"I think we need some help with that [benefits] ... What are some types of services or resources could we add to our benefits package? We need to think about that."*
- *I am curious about what the benefit package means.*
- *"I am most excited by the benefits idea that you have. Like, oh, man, even if you weren't like going to do that I would probably still seek ... something like that."*



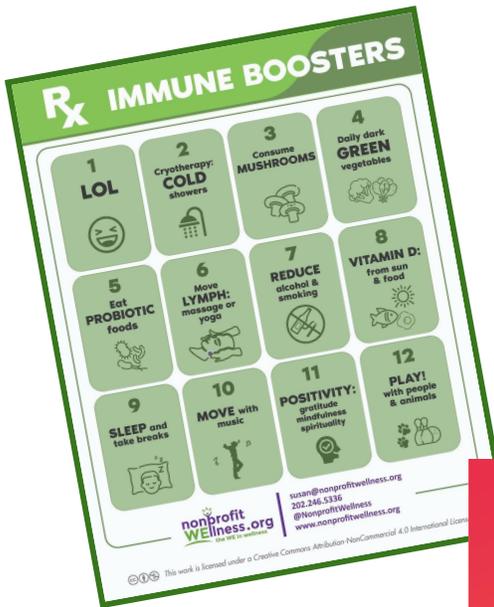
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(4) Resources: Tools and Materials

Nonprofit Wellness offers an abundance of resources in various formats (including Spanish). Our tools foster self reflection, self growth, and team wellness through questions, games, and assessments. They are available for free, and our core three-part training series demonstrates how best to utilize and facilitate them.

- "And like the tools, tips and lists, that's something the organization can provide out to people and give them the choice to pick or not to pick."
- "The idea you had around real paper materials ... I like that"
- "I think what jumps out to me are the tools lists, and the live group sessions."



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Por favor, escriba como vas a aumentar o disminuir tu dosis

Con qué frecuencia o por cuánto tiempo

Amistades _____
Gratitud _____
Espiritualidad _____
Meditación _____
Tiempo de Pantallas _____
Intoxicantes _____
Familia / Niños _____
Jugar / Alegría _____
Ejercicio _____
Baillar _____
Planear Vacaciones _____
Dormir / Descansar _____
Sonreír / Reír _____
Tomar descansos, esp. en la naturaleza _____
Artes visuales / Teatro _____
Música (escuchar o tocar) _____
Hidratación / Nutrición _____
Artesanía / Crear / Cocinar _____
Amor de mascotas _____

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BRAIN BOOST BINGO
Mix up your 5-minute brain boosts throughout the week.

Make an Earthlopie	Mindfully Make Tea	Sketch Or Color Something	Juggle	Pushups or Handstands
Write Haiku Poetry (5-7-5)	Hold 5 Stretches for 1 Min	Write 10 Reasons You're Grateful	Watch a Nature Video	Quick Call To Funny Friend
Read Poetry (Aloud)	Dance Break!	★	ACV or Coconut Oil Shot	Guided Meditation
Sing A Song	Post Your @Embracek To IG/FB	Do Chair Yoga	Lie Down, Close Eyes	Jump Rope
Sudoku	Run The Stairs	Give a High 5 to 5 People	Work A Jigsaw Puzzle	Google (& Ggle) An Artist

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Rx STRESSOR & RESILIENCE SCORECARD

INSTRUCTIONS:
Please rate whether these identities and circumstances give you no, low, or high challenges. Then rate whether they give you no, low, or high opportunities for growth or joy. These are adult stressors from culture, not the stress of your job responsibilities. You can add your own stressors! You can discuss them with others. You are resilient. To take care of yourself and your team, please see the Personal Stress Prescription.

CHALLENGE SCALE	IDENTITY	GROWTH AND JOY SCALE
N/A Low High		N/A Low High
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Race	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Preference	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Immigrant Status	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Political identity	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Religious identity	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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CHALLENGE SCALE	CIRCUMSTANCE	GROWTH AND JOY SCALE
N/A Low High		N/A Low High
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Occupation	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Economic status	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Pandemic / natural disaster	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Divorce / relationship trouble	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Recent death of family or friend	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Unexpected life event	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Impacted by incarceration	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Impacted by military service	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary trauma	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Caretaker: kids / parents	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Chronic illness, in/visible disability	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Housing	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Food allergy/preferences	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Add yours _____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

* To measure childhood experiences including trauma (ACE) and resilience, see additional handouts.

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