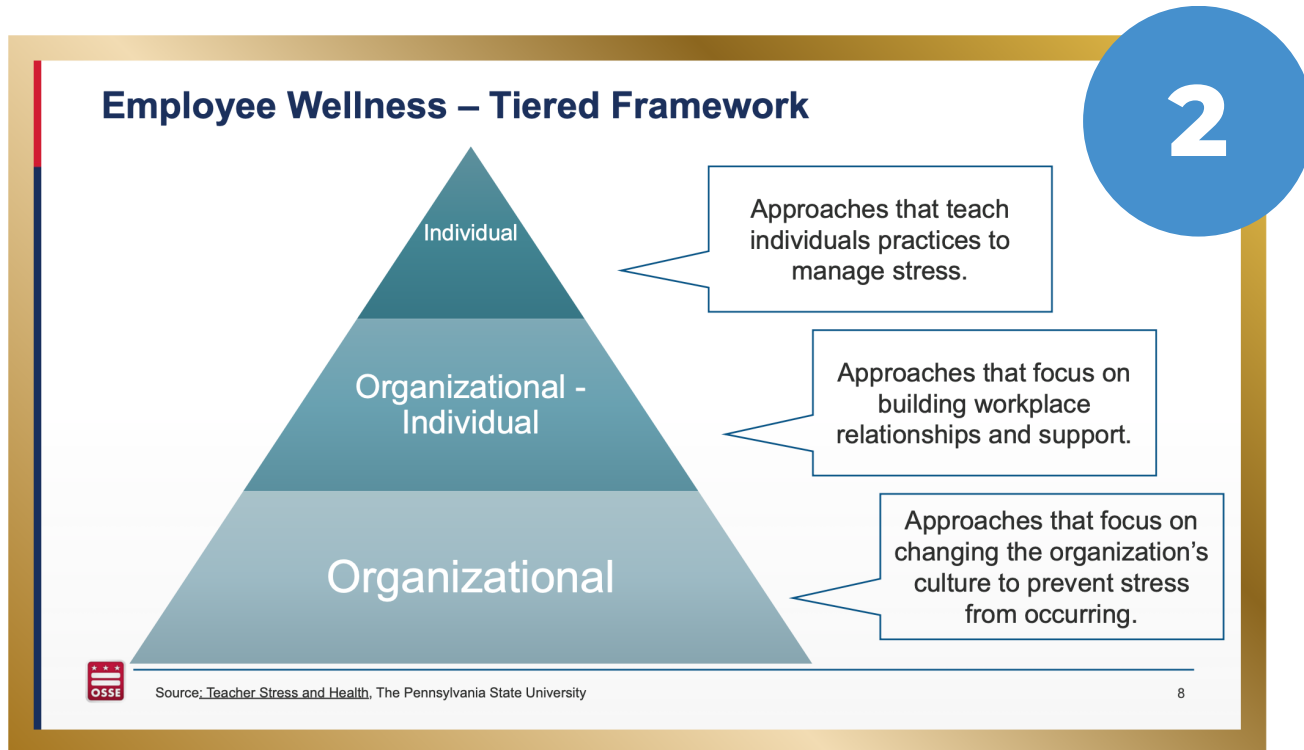


2023



EDUCATOR WELLNESS IMPACT REPORT



ABOUT OUR WELLNESS WORK

Through the pandemic, both students and educators suffered great trauma and have struggled with mental health and wellbeing. As students returned to in-person learning, challenging student behaviors have skyrocketed and the demands on educators to meet student needs are high. **Sadly, teacher turnover has spiked with 30 % of educators leaving their classrooms from SY21-22 to 22-23.** We must take action now to support our educators so that we can have stable schools based on strong relationships for our students and families. **EmpowerEd was founded to address this challenge with educator retention.** Two years ago EmpowerEd was one of five grantees chosen for the OSSE (Office of the State Superintendent of Education) educator wellness grant which has enabled two-year deep partnerships with five DC schools to improve educator wellness, morale, and retention using a **three-tiered model of wellness (see the image above)** - a model we're also using with a dozen other school partners here in DC. Too often, however, educator retention has focused only on surface-level self-care initiatives. **We see educator wellness differently.** Rather than only focusing on the surface layer of stress management with teachers, our whole-school wellness model also emphasizes building a positive school climate and changing systems that bring unnecessary stress.

INVESTMENTS FOR OUTCOMES

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- ◆ DC has the highest teacher turnover rate in the country, with an average of **25 % of educators leaving their schools each year**, far above even the national urban average of between 16-19 %. With an increase in challenging student behavior, continued stress and trauma from the residual effects of the pandemic, and the increased demand on educators, turnover has again skyrocketed post-pandemic with 30 % of educators leaving their schools from school years 21-22 to 22-23.
- ◆ In EmpowerEd's 2021 city-wide teacher survey, **83% of educators** said morale had worsened from previous years.
- ◆ In our 2022-2023 city-wide educator survey, over **40% of educators** say they are likely to leave their school this year or within the next 1-2 years and only **27 %** say they are likely to stay for more than 5 years!
- ◆ Nationally, **79% of surveyed teachers** reported dissatisfaction with their work conditions (Hart Research).
- ◆ Nearly **1:4 of teachers** said they were likely to leave their jobs by the end of the 2020–2021 school year, with Black teachers most likely to leave (RAND).



SCHOOL TRAUMA TO WELLNESS PATHWAY

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Throughout our work with school partners, we've seen schools and leaders progress across **a trackable path of wellness growth as a learning community**. Inspired by our Washington DC Community of Practice with other educator wellness practitioners, we have developed these four stages for school growth from trauma to ongoing school wellness.

Stage One: Control Without Connection

Schools in this stage exist in a state of overwhelm. Staff members often don't communicate openly as a school community, but rather through private "venting" conversations. When traumatic events happen, staff are expected to press forward and aren't given the chance to process the difficult experience. Often, schools in this stage have multiple traumatic incidents that haven't been processed. Even when everyone is working extremely hard, there is still a general lack of trust in the building.

Indicators: *When trauma happens, often staff feel there wasn't sufficient time or follow up dedicated to addressing the event; Staff report not having enough time, space, or trusted formats to openly discuss their concerns or ideas; Staff report feeling constant pressure to do more, and expect more meaningful feedback or recognition than leaders are able to provide. Leaders try to motivate educators primarily through formal accountability systems and feel frustrated by a lack of compliance or enthusiasm; School leaders make many of the decisions without consulting staff; Staff burnout and turnover is high for both veteran and new teachers.*

Stage Two: Mixed Messages

Schools in this stage have administrators who recognize the importance of addressing educator burnout and school culture, but their interventions don't always seem to help staff with their well-being. School leaders also understand the importance of educator wellness, but the day-to-day stresses of running a school and upholding LEA or district mandates means that teacher wellness often falls down their to-do list. Often, schools in this stage have difficulty "walking their talk," and staff members feel frustrated by the mixed messages they receive about their wellness.

Indicators: *When school trauma happens, the leader is quick to address it, but there is little follow through for trauma-sensitive, ongoing healing; Even though there is time and space, many staff members don't feel comfortable sharing their concerns or ideas in a public setting or with leadership directly; Educators are motivated through a mixture of formal accountability systems and positive human-centered approaches; School leaders usually consult the same group of teachers to make decisions; Staff burnout and turnover are still high. Veteran teachers stay on but many new teachers only stay 1-2 years.*

SCHOOL TRAUMA TO WELLNESS PATHWAY

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Stage Three: Wellness Momentum

Schools in this stage have administrators who recognize the importance of addressing educator burnout and school culture, and work with trained professionals to ensure proper attention to ongoing staff well-being. They also recognize the connection between meaningfully addressing immediate school trauma and ongoing school wellness. Rather than “one and done” sessions or surface-level approaches, school leaders invest in and commit to sustainable staff-led educator wellness initiatives. In this stage, educator wellness has been put into action, but both leaders and staff still struggle with the unrealistic expectations and realities of the teaching profession.

Indicators: *During times of trauma, staff has come to expect meaningful school-wide interventions that help them with their healing; Staff feedback is encouraged and implemented in new policies and procedures; Staff members are motivated mainly through positive human-centered approaches but still feel the pressure of system-wide initiatives and accountability systems; School leaders attempt to hear from a diverse range of staff when making decisions, but some staff still feel that others' views are weighed more heavily than their own; Turnover is lower than in other schools but still, many staff struggle with the unrealistic expectations of the teaching profession.*

Stage Four: Sustainable Thriving School

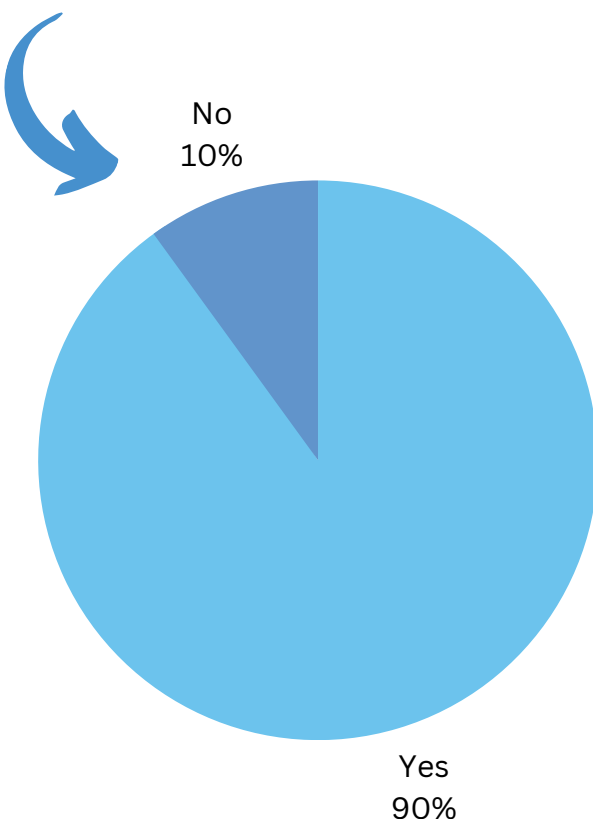
Schools at this stage have leaders who have figured out how to transform the system to cultivate a different kind of whole-school wellness. Many of the traditional hierarchies have been softened to lessen the workload on administrators and encourage a more representative voice from all staff in decision making. Staff have worked with families and community partners to create a flexible and sustainable schedule that both upholds educator well-being and increases student learning and engagement. At this stage, every person in the building sees themselves as a leader, and the learning environment is transformed into a community that is enlivened by the mission of the school and a feeling of deep connection.

Indicators: *When traumatic events happen, staff use it as an opportunity to deepen their connection as a school, and advocate for better outcomes in the greater community; Every student and staff member feels empowered to share feedback in a way that feels accessible, and there are proven procedures to ensure feedback is implemented; Staff members are motivated by their shared leadership, strong relationships within the building, and an authentic connection to the school's mission; School leaders have intentionally built both formal and informal systems of listening to staff voices equitably, and are constantly refining those systems to be even more inclusive; Staff members feel committed to being part of the school community for a large portion of their careers.*

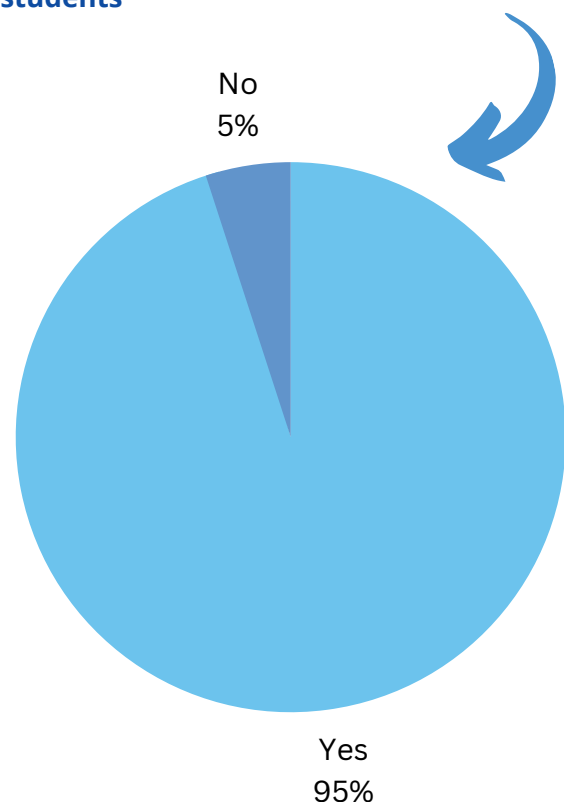
The Effectiveness of EmpowerEd's Educator Wellness Approach:

- Over 16 DCPS and Public Charter schools served through educator wellness and teacher leadership development programs, EmpowerEd was one of five grantees chosen for the OSSE educator wellness grant which has enabled two-year deep partnerships with five DC schools to improve educator wellness, morale, and retention.
- 1,500 DC educators whom we've surveyed on themes about educator wellness and flexible scheduling, helping us to establish the actual needs of DC educators in this COVID period

"In this workshop, I learned new ideas and perspectives that I believe will positively influence my personal wellness."

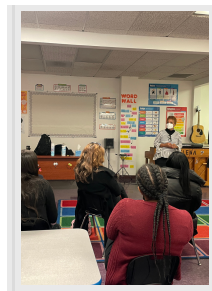


"I believe the three-tiered educator wellness approach (personal wellness, staff culture, and systemic change) has the potential to positively transform our school for staff and students"



The Effectiveness of EmpowerEd's Educator Wellness Approach Continued:

- 100% of participants who participated in EmpowerEd's 5 schools "Thriving Schools" cohort, said that the series was a valuable use of their time!
- 100% of participants in our "Thriving Schools" cohort said they believe their participation in the cohort *will* improve morale and retention at their school.
- 95% of participants of our school partners in school year 2022-2023 say they believe our approach has the potential to positively transform their school for both students and staff.
- We have trained 65 DC educators on our school-based educator wellness teams who are committed to leading ongoing, sustainable change in their school communities.
- Outreach from schools has more than tripled this school year (22-23) signifying the systemic need for our personal wellness and systems change educator wellness work.



EMPOWERED'S KEY STRATEGIES

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1. Staff-Led Professional Development

At EmpowerEd, we see staff-led professional development as central to the work of whole-school wellness and teacher retention. Too many schools ignore the expertise of their own educators and miss the valuable opportunity of allowing staff members to learn from each other. The more informal tone of these staff-led sessions leads to important community bonding, a deeper sense of professionalism, and the elevation of teacher leadership in the building.

Caution: These sessions need careful planning. For staff-led professional development to be done well, educators need a consistent schedule for sharing and appropriate guidance for developing their sessions to meet staff needs.

2. Improving Communication

One of the biggest wellness needs we hear from teachers is improving staff communication. This looks different at every school but some systems we have implemented are: updating staff organization charts, creating new internal message systems, and refining teacher-parenting communication systems.

Caution: Ask staff what they need before implementing any new initiative. A well-designed survey can help you learn a lot about what communication methods educators need and the best way people like to communicate (text vs. email, in-person vs. virtual, formal vs. informal)

3. Bridging Community Divides

There will be differences in any school environment be it veteran vs. new teachers, subject matter silos, or the bigger ones like racial and other cultural backgrounds. The best way to keep these differences from turning into community divides is to address them head-on, with careful facilitation and opportunities for meaningful conversation between staff members.

Caution: Due to the racialized trauma in our society, these sensitive community conversations need the support of a trained facilitator to ensure all community members are being heard, especially those coming from marginalized backgrounds.

EMPOWERED'S KEY STRATEGIES

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4. Flexible Scheduling

Workplaces are becoming more flexible, and both educators and students can benefit from well-designed flexible scheduling for schools that allow educators more time to plan, collaborate and balance their own lives while students access enriching experiential learning, tailored instruction, internships, and more. Flexible Scheduling is being talked about so much right now for teacher retention that we believe it's not *IF* flexible scheduling for educators will happen but *HOW* to make this model work for teachers, students, and families. EmpowerEd has done some important research on different models that can be right for each school.

Caution: Without proper funding, students may not be able to reap the benefits of flexible scheduling that teachers need to stay in the profession. Ensure that your District is allotting appropriate funds for coordination positions and community partners to ensure flexible scheduling benefits all parties.

5. Increasing Avenues for Staff Voice in Decision-Making

EmpowerEd was founded to uplift the powerful voices of teachers and our method of encouraging teacher leadership remains one of our most powerful techniques for educator wellness and retention with our school partners. We use a number of innovative techniques, such as organizing ongoing staff-led task forces to address important topics and give meaningful feedback to leadership.

Caution: Due to the fear of retribution, it can be very difficult for staff members to start sharing their honest opinions with leadership. We recommend bringing in an impartial outside partner who can communicate openly with staff and share recommendations with leadership to help build ongoing trust and shared decision-making.



CASE STUDY

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The Beginning:

A language-immersion public charter school elementary school in Northeast Washington, DC contacted us two years ago because of ongoing staff cultural differences that had begun turning into divides. Staff members reported feeling disconnected from the other language program and leadership knew they needed outside support to create a more cohesive staff culture that was conducive to creating an open, caring learning environment for both staff and students.

EmpowerEd's Solutions:

- We started with a general self-care series to strengthen the practice and perspectives of staff and help improve personal communication skills among individuals.
- After a few months, we asked for teacher volunteers to facilitate small focus groups to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of staff culture.
- We helped analyze those results, formed three task force groups to address the major themes of the survey and further trained the teacher facilitators to meet monthly with those groups for in-depth discussion and brainstorming of ideas.
- Based on those ideas, we created a staff-led PD calendar which included monthly workshops led by teachers for teachers on themes such as increasing student engagement in the classroom, using music to better understand cultural differences, implementing restorative justice in the classroom, and more.

CASE STUDY

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Results:

After a concentrated period of work together, we have heard from both leadership and educators that the staff cultural divides have softened and there has been a much more open and productive discussion about cultural differences. Staff members have gotten to know each other better personally and there is a feeling of greater “togetherness” in the building. The teacher facilitators continue to take initiative and help their groups channel their ideas into future staff-led professional development sessions and social events which leadership supports and encourages. We are delighted to report that this school no longer requires a partnership with EmpowerEd and feel very excited about the sustainable educator wellness they have worked to achieve!



TESTIMONIALS FOR OUR WHOLE SCHOOL WORK

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- ◆ "EmpowerEd's educator wellness workshop was even more helpful than I was imagining! They shared really impactful self-care techniques to help educators, lead us through great team-building exercises, and even guided us to map out all the amazing expertise of our staff which we will use for future staff-led PD. At the end of the session, they surveyed staff on their wellness needs and helped us write the basis of an educator wellness plan for Burroughs. We'll use the EmpowerEd wellness resources to help us grow as a stronger staff and school. I highly recommend this workshop to other schools who want to show their teachers how much they are valued."

Principal Jenkins, Principal
John Burroughs Elementary School, DCPS

- ◆ "At a school like Monument Academy, wellness is deeply important to us but sometimes our dedication to our students leaves educators needing extra support. Our collaboration with EmpowerEd has helped us to keep an important focus on educator well-being over this past school year. They've helped us with important surveying of our staff, writing a detailed educator wellness plan, and supporting us with monthly meetings to make sure we're achieving our educator wellness goals. Our sessions with them both feel very therapeutic but also productive. I've noticed the positive effect of our educator wellness team and I look forward to building on the work we've done with EmpowerEd for years to come."

Danielle Nelson, Wellness Coordinator
Monument Academy Middle School, PCS

Testimonies Continued...

- ◆ "With EmpowerEd's support, we have been able to create a sustainable staff-led professional development initiative at Sela PCS. They helped us organize teacher facilitators, trained us in surveying methods, and then worked with us to create ongoing teacher-led task forces to help us voice our opinions and workshop solutions. As the leader of the professional development task force, I've been able to organize my colleagues into fun and engaging peer learning sessions with clear takeaways. Teachers are very proud of the work that we are doing and it's felt empowering to help lead this work!"

Mariah Slade, Lead Teacher
Sela Elementary School, PCS





This Educator Wellness Report is intended to be the start of an essential conversation. As a leader in education, we invite you to reflect on what tiers of educator wellness you are ready to put into action and the support you will need to make this change effective and sustainable. At EmpowerEd, we are excited to support you through our TEAM surveying, key working strategies, and train-the-trainer programs. We have learned so much through our DC partner schools and want to help you make the same change in your school. Please contact us for a free consultation and we can help you establish your educator wellness goals and the best way to carry them out. We can't wait to see the changes start happening for you and your teaching team. Thank you for reading and caring about educator well-being!



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