



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

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How should P-12 schools, districts and teacher preparation programs work together to build on the momentum of "wellness"?

Wellness is a trendy topic right now, as evidenced by images and stories in popular culture and initiatives in P-12 schools and college campuses. Social media is a great place to find celebrities and the general public alike, posting selfies of yoga poses in exotic places or sharing the wonders of the latest 10-day cleanse. There are mindfulness apps developed especially for every age group and walk of life. In general, "wellness" seems to mean a balance of mental and physical health. Individuals can improve wellness through intentional strategies and habits.

School leaders are familiar with recent [studies](#) that show a significant increase in anxiety, depression and suicide amongst youth, particularly among vulnerable groups already impacted by multiple factors. Teachers see evidence of these trends in their classes, and many have integrated practices of "mindfulness" in their classrooms. Many teachers now incorporate such routines as deep breathing exercises, meditation, and interactive mindful games into the regular school day.

Certainly, teachers, administrators and parents alike are looking for ways to make the school-day a healthy space for learners. Many districts have made the connection that healthy students need healthy teachers, and have begun offering resources, support and PD for teachers who self-select these opportunities. We are all familiar with the high rates of teacher burn-out, and a robust wellness program for teachers seems like an obvious way to keep valuable teachers from leaving the classroom. How do teacher preparation programs share in this responsibility of teacher wellness? Admittedly, teacher preparation programs often leave the heavy-lifting of this kind of practitioner-based expertise to the schools; student teachers will learn about these initiatives from their mentors, right?

In my graduate teacher education program, we are actively discussing this question and experimenting with various ways to integrate wellness into our curriculum. Like P-12 school leaders, we need to consider how we support our students as *students* in a relentless year of preparation, and then as professionals who need to effectively support their P-12 students. One thing we are doing is to require a wellness plan for internship. While there are so many requirements by the state for certification (skills testing, edTPA, DPGP) this one is just designed for student-success. As Curry and O'Brien (2012) note, shifting to a "wellness paradigm" during teacher education is a promising way to combat new-teacher attrition.

We have also worked to integrate content on social-emotional learning such as the RULER program, found in many schools across Washington (see the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence). In this program, students learn to identify, name and manage their emotions, allowing individual learners to build an emotionally-intelligent community. Student teachers in our program practice the RULER methods in their own classroom community, and then discuss how to apply this with their P-12 students. A similar example is our recent inclusion of materials and training in trauma-informed practice. Rather than leaving this important body of knowledge and strategies to school counselors and mental-health professionals, we have incorporated a module in trauma-informed practice into our *Introduction to Teaching* course. That way, student teachers come to internship with a bit of knowledge and practice with delicate but necessary skillset.

The concept of wellness in education is clearly a group effort. We are all motivated to prepare our students to be healthy citizens who can live full lives who contribute to our global community. School and district leaders want the teachers that you invest in to stay in your district, and teacher preparation programs want our graduates to persist in this profession. Just like our collaboration to research and improve anything in curriculum and instruction, we need to find ways to work together on concepts such as wellness.

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Resources and References:

Mindful games (see the activity cards developed by Susan Kaiser Greenland & Annaka Harris) or visit <https://www.edutopia.org/topic/teacher-wellness>.

RULER program:

<http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/>

Curry, J. & O'Brien, E. (2012). Teacher stress reduction, burnout resilience, and promoting retention. *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry*, 14 (3).



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