

The Ecology of Wellness: A Discussion By and For the DC CoP Updated June 3, 2020

Thank you to our colleagues Marisa Parrella, Director of the School Based Mental Health (SBMH) Program at Mary's Center, Brigham Kiplinger, Principal at Garrison Elementary School located in Shaw, and Tiffani Boykin, LPC, SBMH Therapist at Mary's Center for sharing best practices to promoting wellness from the perspective of an organization, a school, and an individual, respectively. They, along with their colleagues, facilitated breakout discussions with DC School Behavioral Health Community of Practice (CoP) members on May 13, 2020. The notes below are from those discussions. The [presentation slides](#) and the [video recording and chat](#) are available on the DC CoP website.

For information on DC resources, the DC Government actively maintains a webpage of official local information on the coronavirus response that includes food resources, health guidance, resources for businesses and individuals, the operating status of government agencies, and more: <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/>. Visit the Department of Behavioral Health website for further Telemental Health resources and guidance for COVID-19: <https://bit.ly/3gLy3c1>

Breakout Discussion Summary

How can we promote wellness and boost morale in light of predictions that we won't return to school in the near future?

- Focus on one day at a time. Remember what is in your control and what is not.
- Stay connected with others.
- Break down projects into smaller, more reasonable tasks.
- Practice grace and understand that it might look different than before.
- Focus on short-term plans. In the current context, future plans may best be discussed in days and weeks, not months and years.
- Incorporate as much joy as you can into work and life right now.
- Have compassion and empathy for individuals; we are all trying our best.
- Designate time in your schedule for self-care and do not let it be a casualty of your schedule.
- Establish wellness check-ins among staff. For example, institute a “wellness hour” for staff to connect about things other than work.
- Implement programs for staff focused on grief and loss, both experienced personally and by students.

What systems or support networks can we implement that balance accountability and personal responsibility, while taking a holistic and trauma-informed approach?

- Set deadlines and routinely revisit responsibilities.
- Establish an accountability buddy. Identify peers to check-in with one another and provide support when necessary.
- Encourage staff to take breaks when needed. Carve out time for staff to take time for themselves. For example, end the day early on Fridays.
- Exchange phone numbers among staff who want to connect and set a daily check-in time.
- Leverage virtual learning by implementing a Tier 1 program school-wide using an online platform.
- Focus on supporting individuals who are providing and receiving services.
- Establish a wellness team for both your professional and personal life. Share wellness practices as a way to support one another.

What agency or school level strategies have been successful in supporting wellness?

- Distribute food and other resources to families.
- Start wellness team meetings with a mindfulness exercise, rotating the leader of the activity each meeting. Use meetings to foster feelings of connectedness, such as by interacting around trivia questions.
- Participate in joint problem-solving to address shared challenges.
- Hold virtual hangouts for staff like painting sessions, happy hours, exercise routines, or a Wellness Wednesday. Record videos to promote a shared activity and to teach and learn new skills, such as cooking.
- Implement a sense of grace and compassion for teachers and students by exercising flexibility.
- Schedule time for community-building; allow students to participate in games and activities with peers online.

What is one takeaway or realistic goal you can implement to improve wellness for yourself, staff, or students?

- What works one day might not work the next, be flexible.
- Set clear boundaries for how and when to practice self-care.
- Take a brief (10-15 minute) break to walk outside or get away from your work area.
- Reach out to supervisors when in need of more help.

Reflection Questions to Facilitate Dialogue in Your Community

1. What does the term “wellness” mean to you?
2. What strategies have worked? What strategies haven’t worked?
3. How will you know you are successful?
4. How can improved (positive) wellness be measured?
5. What is the biggest obstacle in your way/what makes it hard to make wellness a priority?
6. What are some realistic goals you could set for improving self, staff, and students’ wellness?

Additional Resources Discussed

Articles

- [The 4 Things Resilient Teams Do](#)

Tools

- [Brief Weekly Wellness Assessment](#)
- [Building a Resilient Health Care Workforce: Advocacy Tool](#)
- [Personal Assessment and Reflection of SEL Competence for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults](#)
- [SAMHSA’s Wellness Initiative: Eight Dimensions of Wellness](#)
- [Self-Care Starter Kit](#)
- [Teen Wellness SelfAssessment](#)
- [Wellness in Eight Dimensions](#)

Websites

- [CASEL \(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning\)](#)
- [Clinician Well-Being Knowledge Hub](#)