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**Declining Teacher Wellness: A Case Study on Elementary Teachers' Perceptions
of Leadership Strategies That Positively Impact Wellness**

by

Kate Syson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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In

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Declining Teacher Wellness: A Case Study on Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Leadership Strategies that Positively Impact Wellness

by

Kate M. Syson

This dissertation is completed as a partial requirement for the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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Abstract

Teachers today are stressed, fatigued, and burning out. The world of teaching is becoming more complex with the increased needs of students, extra workload demands, and lasting effects of a pandemic that turned the education world on its head. At the same time there is pressure and an expectation on school leaders to demonstrate a commitment to the health and well-being of all teachers. The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to investigate how rural elementary school teachers perceive their wellness is impacted by their school leaders. A questionnaire distributed to 53 elementary school teachers with at least 1 year of teaching experience and a follow-up focus group revealed three themes related to teacher flourishing (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018) and Dunn's (1961) model of optimal wellness. The three themes include (a) being seen and valued, (b) human traits, and (c) school improvement and all articulate how teachers perceive they are best supported and what specific leadership strategies and conditions teachers feel impact their wellness and ability to flourish at work.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my big brother Justin Holton, a fellow educator, whom I lost six months after beginning this program. I know you were cheering me along the whole way and your words to me, "I'm so proud of you," only days before you passed kept me going more than you will ever know.

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Chapter 1: Declining Teacher Wellness

Recent data and commissioned studies over the last 30 years have highlighted the negative state of teacher wellness within education today (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020; Gray & Taie, 2015; Klassen, 2010). In a national study conducted by King and Peart (1992), 55% of teachers responding to a stress scale questionnaire indicated that they were almost always exhausted at the end of a regular school day and 45% indicated that their workload was too heavy to do their job well. Almost three decades later, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2020) conducted a survey that gathered the voices of over 300,000 teachers in all provinces across the country. Participants in this survey detailed unbearable levels of stress, anxiety, and struggling to cope and teach. Close to 70% of respondents were concerned about their own mental health and well-being. Following the release of this Canadian study, Alberta psychologist Dr. Jody Carrington (2021) highlighted these notions of stress, anxiety, and struggle among teachers in her book *Teachers These Days* by recounting real-life stories of decreasing teacher wellness across North America. The declining wellness of teachers in Canada, including Alberta, is a problem.

Alberta Education has legislated practice standards for teachers and school leaders that both describe and mandate best practices. Within the competencies and indicators of each standard, elements of wellness are identified. The *Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)* (Alberta Education, 2018a), a framework for school leader practice, lists wellness-related competencies and indicators including building effective relationships, collaborating with others to ensure engagement and well-being, and recognizing staff accomplishments. Given that the standard was written into law in Alberta in 2019, the presence of these wellness competencies and indicators

signifies that teacher wellness has been understood by legislators as an important aspect of leadership within Alberta's education system for the last several years.

Why Wellness Matters

Teachers play a crucial role in the lives of students (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Hook (2020), an American philosopher, said in his book *Education for Modern Man*, "Most people remember who their teachers were more than they recall specific methods and techniques" (p. 215), which speaks to the importance of who teachers are and the critical role they play in children's lives. Teachers who are unwell are unable to make deep connections with their students (Haberman, 2005). This disconnect between teachers and their students leads to poor classroom management, disengaged students, and students who feel uncared for and unwelcome in their own classrooms (Haberman, 2005). Knowing what and how to teach becomes relevant after a teacher has connected and established positive relationships with students. When teachers are unwell and unable to establish a relationship, unfortunately, neither good pedagogy nor teacher knowledge of the subject area is sufficient for them to be effective teachers (Haberman, 2005). If there is a personal disconnect between the teachers and their students, then no amount of mentoring, coaching, workshops, classes on discipline and classroom management, or classes offering more subject matter content can provide the teacher with the ability to effectively teach children they do not genuinely respect and care about (Haberman, 2005; Hattie, 2003, 2009; Omdahl & Fritz, 2006). Thus, ensuring that teachers are well and have the ability to create strong teacher-student relationships is key to effective teaching practice. Teacher wellness not only impacts the students but also impacts the economic system through teacher absence and attrition.

Teacher attrition is expensive for school districts. There are many expenses that come with hiring and training new teachers (Ryan et al., 2017). In fact, in the United States of

America, school districts are estimated to lose approximately \$18,000 on expended resources for teacher training, for each teacher who exits the district due to burnout and stress (Ryan et al., 2017). Published reports in academic journals, peer-reviewed articles, and articles by teachers' associations and federations across Canada and the United States suggest that teacher stress and burnout cost billions of dollars annually through absenteeism, staff turnover, and disability claims (Blazer, 2010; Adler et al., 2006; Durr, 2008; Omdahl & Fritz, 2006). These high rates of teacher stress and burnout are preventing some teachers from having long, flourishing careers. Therefore, focusing on the well-being of teachers may be an important and effective way to reduce teacher absenteeism and provide stability for districts in their budgeting processes. School leaders have a role to play in focusing on teacher wellness and transitioning teachers from being overwhelmed to professionally flourishing. This revitalization of the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of teachers might be a missing link in education reform.

Teacher wellness matters (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Teachers need to be healthy, happy, and whole in their work to provide strong support and education to their students (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Teacher wellness is often linked to the term “teacher flourishing” in the literature, and these terms will be used interchangeably in this study. In their research on teacher wellness in Canada, Cherkowski and Walker (2018) defined professional flourishing as teachers feeling a sense of belonging to a group that has purpose. Flourishing teachers notice that their relationships with colleagues, students, and the larger community are positive and fun. Ultimately, they feel like what they do matters, and they are seen and valued in their work (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Similarly, Kutsyuruba et al. (2019b) described a scenario of wellness for teachers where they feel they belong to an “organizational context and professional work setting where teachers flourish and perform to their full capacity” (p. 287). Professional

flourishing as defined and described by Cherkowski and Walker (2018) and Kutsyuruba et al. (2019a) is a key element of the dynamic process of wellness (Dunn, 1961; Hettler et al., 1980; Montoya & Summers, 2021; World Health Organization, n.d.) for teachers and impacts *how* they present to their students each day. The wellness of teachers was an issue prior to the COVID-19 health pandemic; however, the pandemic has heightened the concern for teachers' wellness and mental health as they emerge from three years of isolation and trauma (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2022).

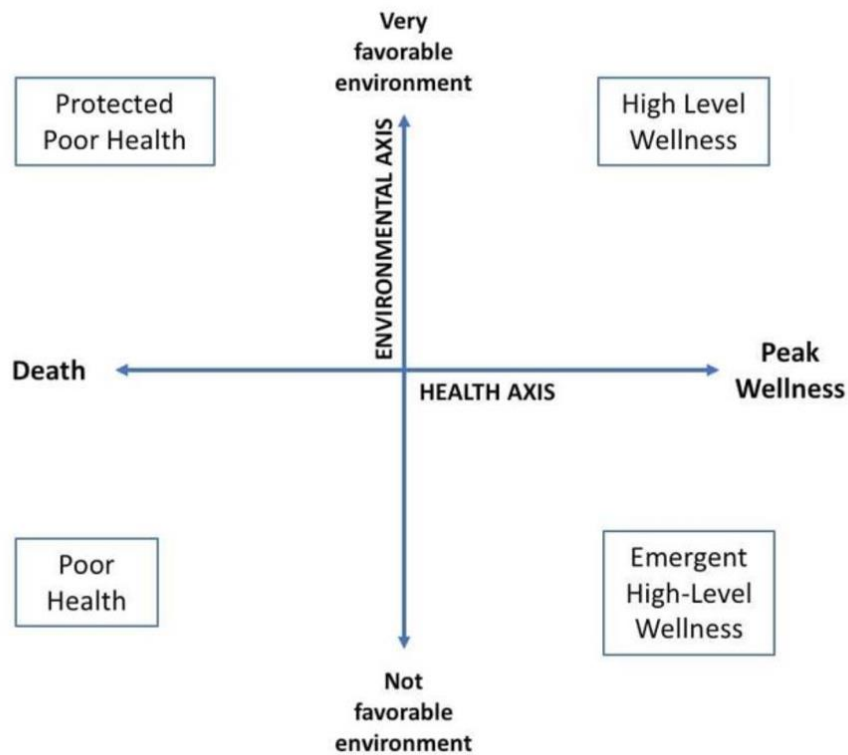
Further Decline in Wellness due to the Pandemic

Teaching and learning conditions created by the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic have made prominent the need to ensure that teachers are well and flourishing more than ever before (Hill et al., 2020). Teacher wellness is of paramount importance to schools (Gray et al., 2017). In 2022 the Canadian Teachers' Federation released the findings from cross-Canada interviews with 32 teachers, revealing that their experiences working through the COVID-19 pandemic are connected to their declining mental health and sense of wellness. This decline in teacher wellness may have a negative impact on schools across Canada (Gray et al., 2017). There were many pressures facing teachers pre-pandemic such as increased demands to meet the diverse learning needs of their students (Gray et al., 2017), burnout, high attrition rates (Brasfield et al. 2019), increased workload, and inadequate resources (Lever et al., 2017). The pandemic has only increased these pressures and added others. Almonacid-Fierro et al. (2021) outlined some of these added pressures. Teachers were forced to adapt and differentiate work to meet the increased needs of their complex learners through virtual means rather than traditional face-to-face instruction. Teachers had to rapidly shift to online methods of delivery to keep students engaged in learning. This led to significantly intensified workloads for teachers who had to move

content and material to an online space and become adept in navigating requisite software (Allen et al., 2020). The workload and learning curve increased overnight as teachers spent hours learning how to use and implement new digital platforms, a variety of online applications, and social networks to teach online. Doing all of this work in isolation, without the support of their colleagues or access to resources that they would usually have if working in a school, increased anxiety and decreased teacher wellness (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021). Adding these pandemic-related demands to a profession that was already struggling with wellness have negatively impacted the working environment, decreasing teachers' wellness and professional flourishing. As educators emerge from the pandemic, school leaders are positioned well to address teacher wellness and implement strategies intended to restore flourishing.

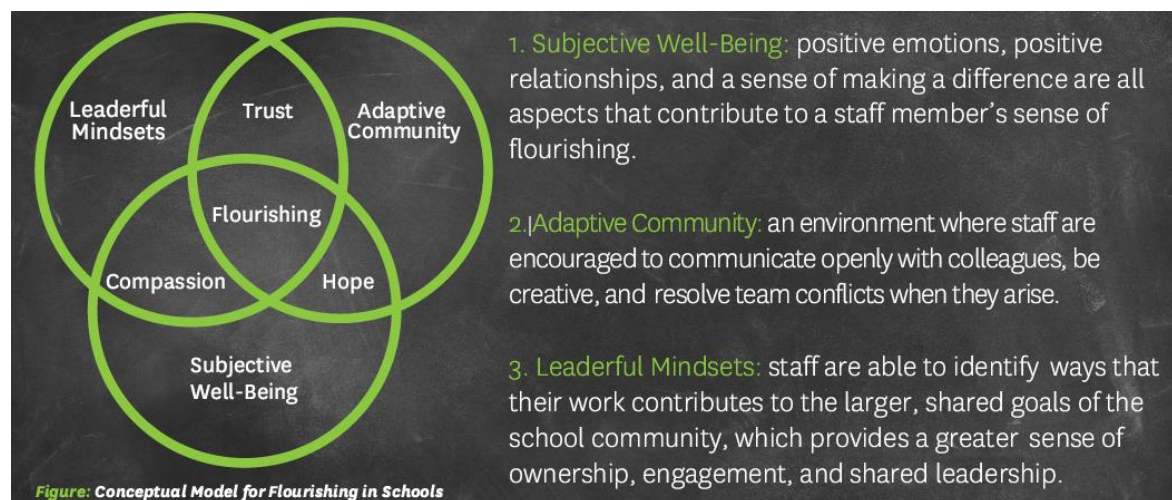
Conceptual Framework

This study is viewed through the blending of two frameworks. The first is Dunn's (1961) wellness model (see Figure 1) and the second is Cherkowski and Walker's (2020) conceptual model for flourishing schools (see Figure 2). Dunn's model illustrates peak wellness and a favorable working environment in general terms to fit all people. The flourishing schools model speaks to quadrant 1 (top right) as the components of what a favorable working environment looks like and adaptive community, subjective well-being, and leaderful mindsets establish what Dunn terms high level wellness which is needed for teachers to flourish. Cherkowski and Walker's (2020) model illustrates what a favorable working environment consists of, specifically for teachers. Therefore, blending the two make this an appropriate lens specific to teacher wellness.

Figure 1*Dunn's Wellness Model*

Note. From *Health State Estimation* [Dissertation, University of California, Irvine], by N. Nag, 2020 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340094680_Health_State_Estimation/).

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Figure 2*Conceptual Model for Flourishing Schools*

Note. From *Workplace Well-Being in K-12 Schools: What Does It Mean to “Flourish” at Work?*

by S. Cherkowski & K. Walker, 2020, EdCan Network & University of British Columbia,

Faculty of Education (<https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/Flourishing-Fact-sheet.pdf>).

Definitions and Discussion of Key Terms

Several terms are used throughout this study that can be interpreted in different ways. For the purposes of this work, the following definitions of key terms are utilized. These definitions provide a common language for understanding the components of teacher wellness and the purpose of this work. They are defined to inform leadership strategies intended to address a problem of practice, decreasing teacher wellness in Alberta schools.

Wellness

The term *wellness* refers to an integrated method of functioning oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. Common dimensions of wellness used in wellness definitions are mental, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, and occupational (Hettler et al., 1980; Montoya & Summers, 2021; National Wellness Institute, 2020; World

Health Organization, n.d.). Dunn (1961) made clear that the state of health is different than the condition of wellness. He asserted that health is more of a passive state of homeostasis or balance, whereas wellness is a dynamic process. The six dimensions of wellness that Dunn refers to are: emotional, physical, intellectual, environmental, spiritual, and social. Many researchers (Ardell & Tager, 1981; McGuire & Snow, 1994; Powers, 1994; Robbins et al., 1999) have supported Dunn's suggestion of the dynamic process in that wellness involves balancing the six dimensions.

Emotional. The emotional dimension is the awareness of one's feelings (Ardell & Tager, 1981). The workplace should be a place where people are able to speak openly about feelings and worries about their work. Feeling positive and maintaining satisfying relationships is important for emotional wellness (Robbins et al., 1999).

Environmental. Environmental wellness is the physical surroundings of a workplace, like lighting, air quality, safety, and comfort. The creation of a stress-reducing and supportive working environment is vital for employee wellness (Kaldy, 1985).

Intellectual. Intellectual wellness includes positive psychological and cognitive well-being. Intellectually well people work to improve themselves, a notion often referred to in the education world as lifelong learning (Ardell & Tager 1981). School leaders can provide such an environment for teachers to grow in knowledge and understanding, in order to nurture teacher intellectual development.

Physical. Physical wellness refers to more conventional aspects of health, like the importance of fitness and nutrition (Blaise, 1996). It is well known that if the body is strong, fit, and well nourished, it is more able to fight off illness (Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Services Administration, 2016). However, the frequently hectic nature of the teaching profession often leaves little time for appropriate eating habits and healthy living.

Social. Social wellness in a school setting entails individuals making a commitment to students, parents, and the community. They participate in their community to improve their social environment (Ardell & Tager, 1981). Healthy relationships and social interactions with other people, including colleagues, should be promoted in order to work with a high level of wellness.

Spiritual. The last component of wellness is spiritual wellness. To develop fully this component, individuals strive for meaning and purpose in their existence and their work to gain an appreciation for life. In an educational setting, spiritual wellness is not limited to religious beliefs, but rather pertains to broader concepts such as moral or character education (Ardell & Tager, 1981).

Flourishing Schools

Dunn (1961) stressed the importance of wellness within the environment where one is functioning, which he called the *favorable working environment*. A favorable working environment is the conditions created to ensure the teacher is able to maximize their potential within the building where they work, including the classroom and the school in general. This is referred to in this paper as professional flourishing. Many have described and understood the word *flourishing* in a variety of ways (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Haybron, 2008; Keyes & Lopez, 2002). In the absence of an agreed-upon definition of flourishing in school contexts, Cherkowski and Walker's (2016) conceptualization of professional flourishing as a complex construct that includes aspects of emotional (feeling good), psychological, and social well-being

(living well) in the work of teaching and learning is adopted for this study. The three main components of a flourishing school are as follows:

1. Subjective Well-Being: positive emotions, positive relationships, and a sense of making a difference are all aspects that contribute to a staff member's sense of flourishing.
2. Adaptive Community: an environment where staff are encouraged to communicate openly with colleagues, be creative, and resolve team conflicts when they arise.
3. Leaderful Mindsets: staff are able to identify ways that their work contributes to the larger, shared goals of the school community, which provides a greater sense of ownership, engagement, and shared leadership. (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016, p. 10).

School Leaders

Terms like *school leader*, *teacher leader*, and others are used in the literature to reference many members of a school administrative team. For this work, school leaders will refer to school principals and vice-principals.

Mental Health

Mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium that enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society (Galderisi et al., 2015). Basic cognitive and social skills; the ability to recognize, express, and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and a harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health that contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium (Galderisi et al., 2015).

These definitions provide a common language for understanding the components of teacher wellness and the purpose of this work relating to leadership strategies that serve to address this problem of practice in Alberta schools.

The State of Teacher Wellness

Wellness is a dynamic process dependent on three criteria: (a) direction and progress toward a higher potential of functioning; (b) the total individual, which includes physical, mental or intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual components; (c) functioning and adapting for daily living and in times of crisis (Dunn, 1961; Mullen 1993). Dunn (1961) believed that there are different states of wellness, and “complete well-being calls for all of these states to happen together—wellness of the body, of the mind and of the environment” (p. 2). Although Dunn’s book was published 60 years ago, his message seems more relevant than ever, especially for teachers today who are teaching amid a health pandemic with ever-changing rules and guidelines, adding undue stress to their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on teachers and teaching align with Dunn’s third criterion of functioning and adapting in times of crisis:

The concept of high-level wellness—in the individual, the family, the community—embodies the preventive aspects of many of the things we are now fighting in terms of disease and disability and social breakdown. Patching up is no longer sufficient. This is why high-level wellness is important to you and to me, and to the larger groups of which we are a part. (1961, p. 7)

Because teachers are charged with shaping and educating future citizens, professional wellness must be an important part of their teaching regimen and professional practice. School leaders in Alberta are charged with the well-being and effectiveness of their teachers as mandated by law

through the LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a). Establishing and maintaining the wellness and professional flourishing of teachers must then be an equally important aspect of the work of school leaders.

Level of Functioning

Teachers today are feeling overwhelmed, burned out, and mentally drained in schools across Alberta (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019). To achieve their full potential as professional educators and to flourish (Cherkowski & Walker 2018), teachers must be physically, socially, and emotionally well. This achievement of wellness, authors agree, is essential because teacher wellness impacts the overall well-being of students and schools where teaching and learning occur (Gray et al., 2017; Gu, 2014; Herman et al., 2018). Stressors facing educators today include large class sizes, increased workloads, inadequate resources, and complex needs of students, which together may compromise teacher wellness and impact teachers' ability to function to their highest potential (Lever et al., 2017). Teachers not performing at peak capacity in turn may compromise the learning environment for the students they teach. Considered in sum, these stressors negatively impact teacher flourishing and can lead to absenteeism and teachers choosing to leave the profession, which as indicated earlier are predictive of student academic outcomes and lower motivation (Pithers & Fogarty, 1995; Zhang & Sapp, 2008).

The stressors above can be more intense for rural teachers, who face them more often than their urban and suburban colleagues do (Barter, 2008), and there are additional stressors less prominent in urban settings. One additional stressor for rural teachers found in Barter's (2008) study within one Canadian province was curriculum delivery, as rural teachers are often expected to teach a wide variety of subjects in multigrade classrooms. A second stressor more prolific in

rural areas is the difficulty in attracting experienced administrators. Some participants noted that “people are more attracted to urban areas, and our smaller towns are often seen as steppingstones to urban work” (Barter, 2008, p. 475). Leadership turnover occurs far more frequently in rural schools, which has an unsettling effect on rural school communities, including the teachers, support staff, parents, and students (Barter, 2008). A third stressor for teachers that more frequently impacts rural schools is the inability to meet student needs due to small operating budgets. Rural school operating budgets in some Alberta districts are allocated based on student enrollment rather than student needs identified within the schools. This lack of funding can cause uncertainty in teacher allocations, both in the number of teachers the school can afford to employ and the complexity of the teaching assignment from year to year. As a result, teachers can be moved, sometimes with little notice, out of a school or to positions teaching a different grade or subject, based on student numbers (Wallin & Newton, 2014). This uncertainty too has an unsettling effect on teacher wellness, on the wellness of the community that they are leaving, and the wellness of the school community they are coming to. Lastly, Barter found that rural teachers used words such as “isolated” and “alone” to describe their professional situation as they do not have grade colleagues or subject teams to collaborate with. The lack of an on-site network of colleagues who understand their subject matter and situational context is far more prevalent for teachers in smaller rural schools.

These added challenges faced by rural teachers impact their overall wellness, who they are, and how they are as teachers—or, stated succinctly, their ability to flourish professionally. This in turn impacts students and student learning.

Being a Teacher

Being a teacher is more than just a job, and teachers' obligations go beyond the need to educate their students on the curriculum. Teachers are in a profession with high demands as they work to meet the diverse learning needs of their students (Gray et al., 2017). According to the *Teaching Quality Standard (TQS)* (Alberta Education, 2018b), teachers are charged with demonstrating six competencies and 30 comprehensive indicators to ensure optimal learning for all students. This comprehensive standard includes indicators of physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual or cultural components of wellness (Alberta Education, 2018b). To meet the standard, teachers must provide evidence that these components of wellness are met for each student, thus creating an environment for students to flourish in. For this flourishing environment to happen for students, teachers must first ensure these components are met in themselves (Covey, 2008).

According to two reports published by teacher organizations, one published pre-pandemic and the other during the pandemic years, many components of teacher wellness are under assault (Alberta Education, 2014; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020). The physical wellness of teachers is impacted by the increased workload (Alberta Education, 2014) represented by the expectations noted earlier and often more that are contextual, often leading to less sleep, body fatigue, and decreased ability to focus (Immordino-Yang, 2016). A report by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2020) described how teachers responded to ever-changing guidelines, protocols, and rules as a result of the pandemic. Survey respondents reported the stress of the unknown created by government- and district-initiated changes added to their overall anxiety and increased mental exhaustion.

The pandemic has greatly affected the social aspect of teachers' professional lives as well (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020). Teachers in rural Alberta and across the world were unable to gather for face-to-face meetings, share spaces with colleagues to enjoy lunch, snacks, or coffee, or see each other smile while passing in the hallways due to masking protocols. The opportunities for teachers to collaborate, celebrate, or meet diminished (Reimers, 2022). The interpersonal and social aspects of being a teacher may carry greater importance to overall wellness than some might think.

The legal requirements of the TQS (Alberta Education, 2018b) as well as the local, societal, and communal elements of being a teacher add to teachers' sense of urgency to preserve their own physical, mental, and emotional health and that of their students. Pandemic uncertainty and increased student needs post pandemic have increased the stress of daily life as routines are disrupted, and as a result both personal and professional anxieties may increase further (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2022).

Complex Student Needs

Teacher wellness and perceived professional self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) are also negatively impacted by increased student mental health issues and an increased number of students traumatized by adverse childhood experiences (Romero et al., 2018). Canadian students struggle with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression at substantially high proportions (Waddell et al., 2013). Approximately 20% of Canadian students struggle with a mental health problem, causing serious impairment to their ability to be successful in school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Further, the American Psychiatric Association (2013) reported a substantial increase in diagnoses such as oppositional defiance disorder and conduct disorders in school-age children within North America. Nearly half of all children have been

exposed to at least one adverse childhood experience, such as poverty, divorce, neglect, homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence, or parent incarceration (Romero et al., 2018). These students often enter school with behaviors that do not blend well with the typical school environment. Teachers are feeling untrained and ill-equipped to deal with the emotional impact of behaviors that students with these diagnoses or emotional baggage are bringing into schools on a daily basis (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015). These negative student behaviors add to stress, anxiety and decreased teacher wellness.

Functioning, Adapting, and Crisis

Dunn's (1961) third criterion of wellness is functioning and adapting for daily living and in times of crisis. This third criterion is easily visible in the context of teachers and teaching in Alberta in 2022. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, described the environment that teachers are currently practicing in as a "time of crisis" (Morse, 2020, p. 4). Upon returning to face-to-face instruction, teachers' ability to function under normal classroom conditions has been reduced and weakened due to the burden of managing health and safety protocols and student infection (Comeau & Vaillancourt, 2021). Pre-pandemic, Canadian teachers had indicated they were struggling with work-life imbalance and increased workplace demands that left them increasingly stressed out and this condition was negatively impacting their ability to teach (Froese-Germain, 2014). The impact of increased teacher responsibilities for student health and the need to adapt to student health issues have been exacerbated by the COVID crisis (Comeau & Vaillancourt, 2021). These impacts extend beyond the classroom as well.

A recent descriptive, survey study (Gaddermann et al., 2021) found that Canadian families with children under the age of 18 living at home have experienced deteriorated mental

health due to the pandemic. The parents ($n= 618$) in the study reported increased alcohol consumption, increased suicidal thoughts and feelings, and increased stress surrounding being safe from physical, emotional, and domestic violence. They reported that these factors were affecting their parenting, and 24.8% of these parents reported a decrease in their children's mental health during the pandemic (Gaddermann et al., 2021). It seems logical that the impacts of the COVID crisis felt at home by children may be visible in classrooms. Teachers are acting *en loco parentis*, in the form of a caring and responsible parent (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019), and accept that burden during the school day. Teachers and parents are struggling to function and adapt for daily living during this time of crisis as children are experiencing these stressors in their homes and their schools.

Teachers in Alberta are stressed and in need of support. Students in Alberta are increasingly under stress and require the support of their teachers. School leaders are in a position to support and care for teachers so they in turn can care for and support students. Teacher wellness, and the strategies and conditions that support wellness and professional flourishing, are the subject of this work.

Purpose Statement

There is a paucity of research, particularly from the Alberta rural context, around highly impactful leadership strategies that improve teacher wellness. Although there is much research on both teacher wellness and school leadership separately, few studies speak to the connection between school leadership strategies and teacher wellness. Research exists on leadership approaches that support teacher wellness; however, the literature is general and does not provide specific strategies or conditions to guide practitioners. This is the gap in the literature that the findings in this study are intended to inform. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative, intrinsic case

study was to understand rural, elementary teachers' perceptions of leadership strategies and how they impact their wellness and ability to flourish as professionals. This study is intended to inform rural elementary school leaders about what leadership strategies and activities teachers perceive as positively impacting their wellness. The guiding research question is "How do rural, elementary teachers perceive their professional wellness is supported by school leaders?"

Significance of Study

Teaching is viewed as a demanding job, with a very high *emotional labor cost* (Brennan, 2006). Brennan (2006) described emotional labor as employment that requires any form of emotion management. Brennan stated that teaching satisfies Hochschild's (1983) three preconditions for emotional labor, which are direct contact, emotional well-being, and public expectation. The first condition is satisfied through ongoing direct contact between teacher and student, the second by the teacher's responsibility for managing students' emotional well-being and the third by the expectations of a professional body, the public, and organizational leaders (Brennan, 2006). The emotional labor cost of the profession is one reason teaching has been described by researchers as highly stressful (Farber, 2000; Vesely et al., 2013). Many authors across North America have described changes in the education system over the years, changes that Jenkins and Calhoun (1991) referred to as a *stress epidemic* given their impact on teachers, the children they teach, and school sites in which they work (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2022; Drago, et al., 1999; Gallen et al., 1995; Hood, 2018). Given this stress epidemic, teacher wellness, and in particular their level of professional flourishing (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018), is decreasing. Teachers are feeling overwhelmed, physically fatigued, and mentally drained in schools across North America (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2020; Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991; King & Peart, 1992).

Teacher wellness as an indicator of mental health and increased concern among teachers around work-related stress have been given greater prominence in provincial government documents and national surveys over the last two decades, such as Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) report and the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2020) survey. Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) created eight deliberate actions, including committing to providing students with excellent teachers and school leaders, stating that "each child will be taught by caring and capable teachers, and every school is led by outstanding principals" (p. 7). To be capable and caring, teachers must be well and cared for themselves. Additionally, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2020) sounded the alarm of a mental health crisis after 70% of 14,000 ($n = 9,800$) teacher respondents stated they were concerned with their mental health and wellness. The impact on the education system of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the social and emotional costs for teachers (Kim et al., 2022). Indicators of this impact include the increase in stress and compassion fatigue felt by teachers, the decrease in emotional connection teachers are feeling with their students, and the decrease in energy levels of teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2020; Baker et al., 2021; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2022). These costs and challenges require a response from school leaders that teachers will perceive as supportive of their overall wellness and ability to flourish. Little research exists specifying the strategies and conditions teachers in Alberta perceive as supporting their wellness and professional flourishing. This study seeks to fill that gap.

As the mental health of teachers is endangered by stressors within the workplace (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020), the duties and expectations of school leaders to address the physical, social, and emotional needs of teachers and students have also expanded and become increasingly complex (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2008; Alberta Education,

2018a; Glickman & Burns, 2021). Consequently, school leaders have been charged with needing to develop skills and acquire the knowledge necessary to implement effective practices that improve teacher wellness so teachers can meet their standards of professional practice. It is important for teachers to feel they are being worked with, not worked on (Gerwertz, 2019). The LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a) outlines professional expectations that principals must demonstrate to create an environment for teachers to do their best work. Teacher wellness and flourishing must be addressed by school leaders (Glickman & Burns, 2021; Sackney et al., 2000) and they may require training in how to do that. Understanding what each teacher may need to feel supported requires hearing the voices of teachers. Practices that are intended to support, yet are not perceived as supportive, do little to improve wellness. This study was designed to shed light on how to design such strategies and conditions to support each individual teacher. There is little known in Alberta currently about which school leader strategies and conditions teachers perceive as contributing to improved wellness and professional flourishing. This study will be of interest to and benefit all school leaders who work in elementary school settings within Alberta.

Summary

Cherkowski and Walker's (2018) ideas on teacher flourishing align with Dunn's (1961) wellness theory as both identify the importance of working toward a greater purpose. Dunn's three elements of wellness—mental health, physical health, and the culture or environment—are all elements which the school leader can have some impact (Sackney et al., 2000). Thus, both Dunn's original definition of wellness and Cherkowski and Walker's (2018) more recent work on wellness among teachers have been used to ground this study on teacher wellness. Pre-pandemic, teachers in Alberta were stressed and their wellness was declining (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015). Since the early days of COVID in March of 2020, many changes have

increased those stress levels and further impacted teacher wellness. It is essential that teachers are supported in improving their wellness and flourishing as professionals. This support begins with the educational leaders who support teachers, who then teach, mold, and grow students into well-rounded human beings. To ensure that students receive the best possible education, the people providing the instruction must be supported (Maag, 2008). Thus, school leaders must know which leadership strategies and conditions best support and enhance teacher wellness and allow teachers to flourish in their work as professionals (Small, 2016). Enduring the pandemic has shown that teachers can adapt in times of crisis and their ability to adapt is related to their wellness. For teachers to continue putting students first, school leaders must adapt and address the factors that detract from wellness.

Knowledge has emerged to indicate that improved wellness may relieve the stress and anxiety that precede teachers leaving the profession at the current elevated rates (Brasfield et al., 2019). Identifying strategies perceived to improve teacher wellness is essential. Leaders will benefit from understanding and implementing the strategies and conditions teachers identify as impacting their wellness. Leaders will also gain insight into the extent to which these strategies impact teacher wellness and can focus efforts on implementing those strategies deemed highly impactful by the very people they are intended to support.

Teacher wellness was a concern 30 years ago and continues to be a growing concern today. Ensuring teachers' wellness is crucial because it impacts the future success of students and, in turn, the economy and the health of society as a whole. The adverse effects of the pandemic are not going away without support for teachers. Ensuring school leaders are knowledgeable about ways to support teacher wellness and allow teachers to flourish in a

favorable working environment is key to this research. Chapter 2 provides a thorough discussion of the literature that describes and bounds the problem forming the basis for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teacher wellness is a current problem within education. Literature in support of teacher wellness as a problem of practice across North America and other parts of the world, is related to the increased workload and instructional demands, increased complex diagnoses of students, and increased levels of fatigue and stress (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020; Froese-Germain, 2014; Gallup, 2014; Gray & Taie, 2015; Kyriacou, 2001; R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015). Teachers are struggling to find work-life balance in their lives. They are reporting feeling burned out, overwhelmed, and mentally drained, and in the midst of a pandemic, this has the potential to become extremely problematic (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020). Holmes (2005) discussed the obvious and hidden factors that affect teacher mental health and wellness. Obvious factors like workload or work-life balance and more hidden factors like the public image of teachers or their own emotional relationship to teaching create a "stressful profession" (Holmes, 2005, p. 5). Yet Holmes indicated the deeper issue is that the teaching profession continues to be stressful. Though factors contributing to stress are repeatedly acknowledged by educators, researchers, and even administrators, there has been little change in education workers' professional circumstances. Educational leaders can play an important role to change this narrative for teachers by implementing purposeful and impactful strategies to address the wellness of the teachers. Kutsyuruba et al. (2019b) said the following about teacher wellness:

Imagine an ideal school world where teachers feel supported in growing professionally and living their dreams of positively influencing students' lives; a school environment where teachers enjoy a quality life inside the school and outside the school; and a school organization context and professional work setting where teachers flourish and perform to their full capacity. (p. 287)

Creating Kutsyuruba et al.'s (2019b) *ideal school world* is what this study aims to help school leaders to do. The literature reviewed in this chapter will begin with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks as they frame the study and will be used later as a lens through which to examine the results. The chapter will then address the problems of teacher wellness, examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and report on leadership behaviors that can impact teacher wellness in a positive way.

Conceptual Frameworks

Dunn's wellness model illustrates that high level wellness is achieved when both a person is well and they are functioning within a very favorable environment. Dunn (1961) made clear that the state of health is different than the condition of wellness. He asserted that health is more of a passive state of homeostasis or balance, whereas wellness is a dynamic process. The six dimensions of wellness that Dunn refers to are: emotional, physical, intellectual, environmental, spiritual, and social. He states that this dynamic process is the ability to balance all six dimensions. Dunn (1961) further stressed the importance of wellness within the environment where one is functioning, which he called the *favorable working environment*. As Dunn's model is not specific to teachers, I used a second model to describe what this favorable working environment might look like specifically for teachers. Thus, Cherkowski and Walker's model for flourishing schools supplements Dunn's model allowing for the context of this work.

Cherkowski and Walkers's flourishing school model (2020) better defines what a favorable working environment looks like for teachers by addressing what three main components are needed in order for teachers to feel connected to their work and flourish within their professional environment. As this study was seeking to understand more about what school leaders can do for teachers within their professional environment, this addition to Dunn's (1961)

wellness model was appropriate. The three named components; subjective well-being; adaptive community; and leaderful mindsets, which are described in detail in chapter one, create a more specific framework that is supported by the literature and by the participants within this study.

Contributing Factors Impacting Teacher Wellness

Many factors are contributing to the decline in teacher wellness within Alberta and across North America. Some of the teacher-reported factors are increased workload and demands (Belliveau et al., 2002; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2007; Dibbon, 2004; Naylor, 2001; Smaller et al., 2005; Sutton & Huberty, 1984), an increase in complexities seen among students (Briere et al., 2008; New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003), and an increase in fatigue among teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2020). These factors are having a negative impact on teachers, evidenced by the increased levels of stress and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), high attrition rates (Leyba, 2009), and negative economic impact on schools (Ryan et al., 2017).

Increased Workload and Demands

Researchers have identified many factors contributing to workload intensification, among which are government expectations, curriculum requirements, and professional development (PD) demands (Belliveau et al., 2002; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2007; Dibbon, 2004; Naylor, 2001; Smaller et al., 2005; Sutton & Huberty, 1984). In October 2003 Smaller et al. (2005) engaged teachers across Canada ($n = 1024$) in a national telephone survey, followed in the spring of 2004 by eight focus groups in three provinces. An important finding of the national survey, commented upon by every focus group participant, was the perception that teacher workloads had increased dramatically in the past five years. A high proportion of teachers in that study (81%) reported an increase or a significant increase in stress on the job due to the workload

(Smaller et al., 2005). Müller et al. (2009) studied the concerns of attracting and retaining teachers in Europe, they gathered questionnaires from teachers in Switzerland ($n = 121$) from both elementary and secondary school settings. This study noted that 50% of teachers leave the teaching profession because of the heavy workload. Moreover, for those teachers who choose to stay and take on the added responsibilities, managing the increasing workload and time while providing excellent instruction for students and remaining well and able to flourish is not something that has been mastered. Thus, teachers who stay in the profession continue to struggle.

To gather data about teacher workload in Alberta, the Alberta Teacher Workload Study (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015) was commissioned. The study was carried out to comply with commitments made under the Assurance for Students' Act and the ensuing modified Framework Agreement. In 2015, the Alberta Teachers' Association launched the study with 3,374 teachers and 357 administrators to collect information about their workload. All data was collected through online surveys. Educators (91% of teachers, 96% of administrators) identified workload as the primary factor that contributed to their dissatisfaction with work. In this same study, teachers identified factors contributing to their dissatisfaction with their work. Perceived value of work (70%), working long hours (48%), social or family demands (42%), and working relationships (32%) were the top four factors contributing to overall job dissatisfaction among teachers (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015). The results of this study are consistent with other studies that examine teachers' practice in Alberta. For example, the teaching and learning international survey completed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2013 looked at working conditions and the learning environment in schools. Overall, 1,773 teachers and 175 principals in 182 schools completed the online survey in Alberta. This study found that Alberta teachers typically worked 48 hours per week, which,

compared to teachers elsewhere in the world, was second only to teachers in Japan (Alberta Education, 2014). Thus, Alberta teachers are working more hours a week than most teachers across the world.

Teacher workload is a problem in other parts of Canada as well. A survey of nearly 1,000 teachers in Saskatchewan was conducted by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (2013). This mixed-method study collected data through an online survey and 10 in-depth follow up interviews. Saskatchewan teachers reported role intensification and increased time spent on work-related activities, which they attributed to changes directed by the school division and government. This increase of time spent on work encroached on teachers' personal lives, and 58% of teachers surveyed reported dissatisfaction with work-life balance. Though the majority of teachers felt that stress was an unavoidable aspect of the profession, 42% strongly agreed and 33% moderately agreed that workload was a cause of stress. Hence, increased teacher workload is not isolated to just one province.

Problems with teacher workload exist in countries other than Canada. A survey of 4,952 teachers across the United States sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics looked at job satisfaction among teachers. Liu and Ramsey (2008) reviewed the results of this study and found that the mean score in certain categories was above 2.5, indicating that teachers were unhappy. Survey questions were Likert scale questions and responses could range from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Over half of participants were unhappy with workload and preparation time, examples include "I often felt my workload was too heavy" ($M = 2.76$), "There was not enough time for planning and preparation" ($M = 2.55$). A greater number of teachers reported that, "There was not enough time available for instruction" ($M = 3.25$), and "Classes I taught were too large" ($M = 3.10$). Further, survey respondents felt that early in their

career they were not given the necessary supports to properly perform the job. Kersaint et al. (2007) studied why teachers leave the profession, and noted that participants identified an emphasis on testing and accountability, excessive administrative duties, and a lack of administrative support as primary causes of job dissatisfaction. Clearly, since 2001 researchers have identified issues of workload and additional demands from governments, districts, and school leaders as a primary cause of deteriorating teacher wellness and opportunities to flourish as professionals.

Increased Complexities Among Students

Today's youth face increasing choices with social media outlets, schooling, activities, and rapid changes in technology (Gysbers et al., 1999). Youth are experiencing the changing nature of the family unit, increased poverty and violence, and constant negative media images of drug use, sexual themes, and violent conflict resolution (Hess & Richards, 1999). Also, the weakening of community institutions that nurture children's moral, emotional, and social development (Greenberg et al., 2003). These constant temptations and inappropriate images that are inundating youth, along with the lack of two-parent families and consistent home lives, are issues that are negatively impacting students. If these issues are not supported or addressed, today's youth are more at risk of lower school performance, dropping out of school, or becoming involved in other self-defeating or destructive behaviors (Cameron et al., 1991; Elmquist & McLaughlin, 2017; Mainous et al., 1996). A quantitative study of 823 adolescents in Southeastern United States was conducted by Mainous et al., and the questionnaire data found that the higher the adolescent was on the Need scale the more likely they are to engage in substance abuse ($p < .05$) and the more likely they are to score higher on the Children's Depression Inventory ($r = .45, p = .0001$). Results of this study suggest that teens are feeling

their needs are unfulfilled and this feeling is leading to an increase in youth engaging in destructive behaviors which is negatively impacting students.

As today's youth face risk, rapid change, and seemingly endless choices, they are in need of effective coping skills to navigate these challenges (Elmquist & McLaughlin, 2017; Hess & Richards, 1999; Lerner et al., 2003; M. J. Montgomery, 2005). Phillips (1993) writes in his book that the number of teenage suicides, homicides, and pregnancies supports the notion that American adolescents need assistance to cope more effectively with the stress in their lives. His book emphasizes the need for integrated and comprehensive preventative and intervention approaches to help children and teachers cope effectively with stress. Phillips and others call on teachers to be part of the solution. Hess and Richards (1999) posited in their article that it is essential for schools to focus on teaching effective coping strategies, implement intervention programs, and teach adolescents how to deal with stress. They recommend teachers learn and carry out programs like Improving Social Awareness-Social Problem Solving (ISA) and incorporate these programs into their extra-curricular activities, study skills, and discipline. Consequently, tasks typically reserved for school psychologists, social workers, nurses, and counsellors are now being tasked to teachers, who are not necessarily equipped or educated to help and support youth navigate ever-increasing challenges. Koller and Bertel (2006) agreed that there is a call for a paradigm shift at the preservice level to better prepare teachers to proactively confront the challenges of today's youth and the difficulties they face serving these students. Their article provides evidence to illustrate the need for training in the area of mental health challenges facing today's youth. Inevitably, the knowledge and skills typically reserved for health care workers are being downloaded onto teachers to deal with the increased complexities of today's youth. The fact that scholarly articles are being written to encourage the need for

teachers to be better equipped to handle the complexities of today's youth is increasing teacher workload and teacher stress.

A Canadian national radio broadcast (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) reported on February 17, 2019, that a major contributing factor to the increased teacher workload is the increasing demands of high-needs students. The broadcaster based these statements on interviews with 10 educators across the country. High needs, according to the broadcast, are categorized as psychological and mental health needs, physical needs, and increased social-emotional needs. Interviews documented educators stating that incidents of verbal and physical violence by students, often targeting staff and fellow classmates, have left them feeling exhausted, and the teachers called on governments and school boards to provide them with more support.

Elementary teachers in Ontario have expressed similar views. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (2017) conducted an online survey with its 81,000 members and found that 70% of Ontario elementary teachers reported experiencing or witnessing violence during the 2016–17 school year. One educator in the study said, "I am not a trained psychologist. I am not a trained social worker. But I am expected to provide these roles for these students every day" (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2017, p. 1). The American Psychiatric Association (2013) has reported that the most common diagnoses seen in schools are oppositional defiance disorder, conduct disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Oppositional defiance disorder and conduct disorder are used to describe kids who are defiant, make unacceptable and sometimes harmful choices, and will not respect authority (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The population of Alberta students in Grades 1 to 12 with identified behavioral needs grew by 13% from 2012 to 2017 (Alberta Education, 2018c). With limited financial resources to

hire support people like mental health specialists, school resource officers, occupational therapists, and social workers, teachers are left overwhelmed and unable to cope with the range of needs that these students present (Alberta Teachers Association & Canadian Association of Principals, 2014).

Having students with these diagnoses in their classrooms means teachers, in addition to providing academic instruction, are dealing with an increasingly complex range of student needs and behaviors. The Alberta Teacher Workload Study (R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015) which included survey data collected from 3,374 teachers and 357 administrators, inquired about factors that were contributing to increased job complexity. The findings revealed increased enrollment of high-needs students (68%) and changes in the scope of work (61%) as the top two contributing factors. Teachers are feeling the effects of having more students with high needs, and educating students is no longer confined to academics and is becoming more about addressing the social and emotional needs of children. In any one year, one in 10 children and young people are said to have a clinically recognizable mental disorder (Briere et al., 2008; New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). Over the last 50 years, reported behavioral problems among children and young people have increased all over the world. A study conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), assessed the extent to which conduct, hyperactivity, and emotional problems have become more common over a 25 year period in three general samples of UK adolescents ($n = 219$). Comparable questionnaires were completed by parents at each time point (1974, 1986, 1999). Results showed a substantial increase over the 25 year study period. Reported behavioral problems rose by 46%, as well as hyperactivity problems rose by 74% and emotional problems rose by 60% (Collishaw et al., 2004). Research has been clear that these high percentages of students with complex needs are impacting teacher wellness in a negative

way. Teachers are asking to be properly trained and have their skills updated regularly to respond to changing needs and new challenges facing students. It is clear more needs to be done to address mental health and emotional well-being for students, which means more teacher training and continual added PD in this area (Warwick et al., 2008).

Fatigue, Stress, and Burnout Among Teachers

Fatigue and stress are high among teachers, which negatively impacts teacher wellness (Borg, 1990; C. Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Montgomery and Rupp conducted a meta-analysis exploring the diverse causes and effect of stress in teachers. They looked at 65 studies on teacher stress between 1998 and 2003. The conclusions of the study showed that teacher stress leads to negative emotions, which increases the likelihood of burnout which is costly for both individuals and society (C. Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Travers and Cooper (2018) found that teachers experience much higher levels of stress compared to other occupations. Their study included a random sample of teachers in the UK ($n = 1790$) who completed questionnaires. Analysis of the results revealed that teachers, as compared with other high stress occupations, experienced poorer mental health and lower job satisfaction. Other findings included that teachers intending to leave the occupation to be most highly related to mental illness in teachers (Travers & Cooper, 2018). Thus, indicating that teacher stress is a problem that is leading to declining teacher wellness. Teaching is a high stress occupation, is supported by a research report from the Health and Safety Executive which confirmed that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, with 41% of teachers reporting high levels of stress (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). This number is compared with 31% in nursing, 29% in managerial jobs, and 27% in professional and support management. Data obtained from Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan showed that one in three educators or members of their families was prescribed antidepressants or antianxiety

medication (Carrington, 2019). The increased number of students with clinical diagnoses in classrooms is leaving educators feeling ill-equipped to handle the significant needs of their students and affecting the ability of teachers to meet their legislated professional responsibilities in the *TQS* (Alberta Education, 2018b; Edmonton Public Schools, Human Resources, Leadership Development, 2018). Teacher wellness and ability to flourish as professionals continue to deteriorate as a result of high workload expectations and demands, complex student needs and added stress, and anxiety and fatigue factors.

Teacher stress and burnout is a concern in many countries around the world. Evidence of this is that teacher burnout and stress is being studied in more than just North America. This is demonstrated by the eleven studies, both quantitative and qualitative, conducted by Maslach and Leiter (2016) in eleven different countries with teacher sample sizes ranging from 378 to 1,892. Burnout was defined as emotional exhaustion, and intent of these studies was to understand the consequences of teacher burnout. Enhanced teacher stress and eventual burnout has been observed around the world and in a variety of forms and contexts. Effects of enhanced stress on teachers include reduced self-efficacy within their profession, lack of engagement with their students, high job attrition rates, and negative impacts on their relationships with their families and students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Individuals working in school settings are particularly vulnerable to work-related stress. Online survey data from the 2013 Gallup-Health-Ways Well-Being Index ($n = 500$) showed that 46% of teachers in kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) settings in the United States reported high levels of daily stress during the school year (Gallup, 2014). Teacher stress is defined as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (Kyriacou, 2001,

p. 28). Using this definition, it seems teachers are not okay (Carrington, 2019). The stress that educators experience affects their enthusiasm for the profession and longevity in the field (Gray & Taie, 2015). For example, a survey of 30,000 teachers in the United States by the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that 89% of respondents said they had been enthusiastic about teaching when they started the profession, but only 15% reported being enthusiastic at the time they completed the survey (Gray & Taie, 2015). Furthermore, stress and reduced well-being is not only a cumulative effect experienced by long-term teachers. Throughout the school year teachers are continually putting in extra hours and time to meet the increasing demands of their jobs. This increase in hours is even more intensified for beginning teachers who are adapting to their new roles and assignments (Froese-Germain, 2014). In a 2014 mixed-method study on work-life balance in the Canadian teaching profession, involving more than 8,000 respondents, Froese-Germain indicated that most teachers struggle with work-life imbalance and increased workplace stress, both of which negatively affect their ability to teach. Work-life imbalance and workplace stress are substantially amplified for early career teachers, who experience significant pressures and challenges associated with starting in the teaching profession (Froese-Germain, 2014). Ensuring teachers are supported early in their careers will help reduce the feelings of stress and fatigue that often lead to burnout and cause teachers to leave the profession early.

Teacher Attrition Rates

Increased stress, fatigue, and burnout are linked to high attrition rates among teachers. According to Allen (2004), teacher attrition rates in Canada in 2004 were approximately 30% in the first 5 years of service. In the United States, Ingersoll (2003) estimated that 45% of teachers leave the profession during the first 5 years of their careers. Similarly, Darling-Hammond (2010) reported that 40–50% of new teachers in the United States, leave after less than 5 years in the

profession. Looking into teacher shortages in the United States, Ingersoll concluded they are not primarily due to an insufficient number of qualified teachers but rather a “revolving door” (2003, p. 11) of teachers leaving due to stress, personal health, increased workload, and job dissatisfaction rather than retirement. The pressures placed on teachers due to having to manage students’ complex needs, working hours exceeding their contracted hours, and effectively implementing curriculum are immense (Clark & Antonelli, 2009; Leyba, 2009). These expectations can be physically and emotionally draining and negatively impact teachers’ overall sense of well-being, leading to job dissatisfaction, decreased productivity, and ultimately burnout (Leyba, 2009). Enhanced stress, inadequate supports, and difficult working conditions prompt a large number of beginning teachers to leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008). A similar quantitative, longitudinal, study (n = 1,990) of teacher attrition rates by Gray and Taie (2015) showed that stress in the education field contributed to the high rates of teacher turnover, with 10% of teachers leaving the profession after 1 year. However, just as stress and reduced well-being were not solely experienced by beginning teachers the same is true for attrition. Many experienced teachers leave the profession because they feel unable to deal with the increased challenges associated with teaching today (Byrne, 1998; Taylor et al., 2005). If more teachers were well and flourishing professionally, and school leaders knew more about how to positively impact teacher wellness, perhaps schools would see a decrease in teacher attrition.

Economic Impact

Another impact of increased stress and fatigue that can lower teacher wellness and limit professional flourishing is the economic impact of attrition on school districts. Teacher attrition is expensive for school districts. There are many expenses that come along with hiring and training new teachers (Ryan et al., 2017). In fact, a journal article published in 2017 reported that

a school district in the United States loses approximately \$18,000 for each teacher who exits the district (Ryan et al., 2017).

Teachers are a key component in the public education system and the central budget cost. In the Canadian province of British Columbia in 1999, for example, \$2.80 billion or 77% of the total school district operating costs were allocated to personnel (G. Wilson, personal communication, 1999). The cost to school budgets is a concern in Canada and the United States. Haberman (2005) stated that the costs to U.S. school systems of teacher turnover have been escalating on an unbroken upward trend line for the last 30 years. In earlier studies, teacher stress and burnout were computed in terms of the cost of simply hiring substitute teachers (Bruno, 1983). More recently the costs of teacher attrition have been expanded to include the costs of recruiting, hiring, and processing new teachers. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004), a group that supports excellence in education across various states in America, stated the current estimate is that teacher stress and turnover now cost U.S. school districts \$2.6 billion annually. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future conducted a pilot study on the cost of teacher turnover in five urban school districts located across Chicago, Milwaukee, Granville County, Jemez Public Schools, and Santa Rosa Public Schools. The results of this study were analyzed by Barnes et al. (2007), who reported that within these districts the average cost was almost \$10,000 per teacher who left education. One noteworthy recommendation that came from the analysis of the study was to "examine what works" (Barnes et al., 2007, p. 35). This recommendation to school districts was to consider best practices and pay attention to education's human resources—in other words, the way teachers were being supported within the buildings—in order to reduce teacher attrition (Watlington et al., 2010). Understanding more about which leadership strategies have the most impact on teacher wellness requires something

similar to what ‘works best’ economically, to identify best practices in promoting teacher wellness and professional flourishing.

COVID-19: Impact of the Pandemic on Wellness

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the statistics and information surrounding decreased teacher well-being were already alarming (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2020, Froese-Germain, 2014; Gadermann et al., 2021; Gallup, 2014; Gray & Taie, 2015; Kyriacou, 2001; R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015). The pandemic has only increased these pressures (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020a). Teachers were forced to adapt and differentiate work to meet the increased needs of their complex learners through virtual means (Polok et al., 2020). Teachers had to rely on limited ways of assessing student work as their usual means and observations, hands-on activities, and oral expression strategies were limited due to the virtual world (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021). The workload and learning curve increased overnight as teachers spent hours learning how to use and implement new digital platforms and social networks to teach online (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021). They did all of this in isolation, without the support of their colleagues and resources that they would usually have access to if working in a school setting (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021). These increased pressures related to COVID restrictions came from school leaders, parents, society, and the government. First, teachers felt pressured by administrators to ensure a quality learning experience for students equal to that of the in-person experience (Kim et al., 2022). Second, there was perceived increased scrutiny of their pedagogy by parents who were often in the background during virtual lessons, and teachers did not feel valued due to social media and media portrayals of teachers by parents and other members of society (Kim et al., 2022). Third, the perceived lack of government support for teachers’ safety and health over time left teachers feeling unsupported (Kim et al.,

2022). In September 2020, the Alberta Teachers' Association conducted a poll gauging the attitudes of 1,600 teachers towards public health guidelines in schools. The vast majority reported "extreme and unsustainable levels" of fatigue, stress, and anxiety, at 94%, 95%, and 81%, respectively. Fourth, after schools were reopened, teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by the government constantly changing safety guidelines and increased demands for teachers to uphold a standard of cleanliness and sanitization which added to their workload (Kim et al., 2022). Relatedly, teachers also felt an increased pressure to provide equitable educational opportunities for those students who were unable to access the internet or needed technology. This acute awareness of inequities prompted creative, above-and-beyond efforts to provide materials and instruction to meet students' needs (Sokal et al., 2020b). These increased demands from administration, parents, and society have not helped teachers to flourish.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (2022) pandemic research report captures first-hand accounts and an in-depth understanding of living through a pandemic as a teacher during the 2020–2021 school year. The collected narratives from interviews with over 2300 teachers reveal how and why various aspects of their professional lives contributed to a perceived decline in mental health. As one teacher put it, "The 2020-2021 school year was a year of stretching the elastic as far as it would go, until it was almost broken" (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2022, p.4). Other notable findings from the report were that 97% of participants stated they experienced increased physical, mental, and emotional workloads and job demands. Teachers felt pulled in multiple directions and were feeling always "on" with growing digital connectivity from email, smartphones, and smartwatches. This impacted their level of anxiety and contributed to the increased fatigue noted earlier. The teachers' narratives suggested they were collectively experiencing an omnipresent sense of emergency, uncertainty, and crisis, which has reached a

point of unsustainability (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2022). School leaders are positioned to help their teachers come out of this pandemic feeling well and able to flourish. Knowing which actions, strategies, and conditions are necessary is the first step in realizing this goal.

Leaders' Impact on Wellness

Common to all levels of teacher experience is the presence of school leaders. The leadership of the school principal has been shown to directly influence teacher stress, well-being, and retention in the profession (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). Leadership behaviors, research has shown, can positively impact work-life balance, provide necessary supports to meet complex student needs, and lower work-related stress and fatigue that impact teacher wellness (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). Principals and vice-principals are known as the key leaders in schools. There is considerable research to support the important role that principals play in terms of school and student success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Heck & Hallinger, 2014). The trickle-down effect in schools is well researched. Whitaker (2012) suggested that everything a principal does affects the teaching staff in the buildings. His popular statement "when the principal sneezes, the whole school catches a cold" (Whitaker, 2012, p. 36) speaks to the impact that principals have on teacher wellness in their buildings. Everything the leader speaks about or focuses on becomes the school's truth and focus. Whitaker (2012) indicated that credibility and great relationships are essential aspects of supporting staff. Great principals are people focused, foster strong relationships, and utilize more than one way of looking at things. In other words, leaders use a collective strategy to create success among their staff. By definition, the collective strategy cannot be achieved in isolation; instead, the achievement of this collective, holistic foundation lies in creating a strong ethos for the school that places these concepts at its core (Adams et al., 2020).

One challenge for leaders is to create an ethos that enables teachers to experiment and take risks, use their passions to inspire students, and explore creativity, working from a lens that views the teacher as a whole. Adams et al. (2020) posited that leaders who adopt practices that create structures that recognize teachers' personal lives and seek to view the teacher as a "whole person" indeed better protect teacher wellness. Furthermore, Kotter (1995) wrote about leaders who create a strong ethos for their school and ensure that "the way we do things around here" (p. 11) seeps into the bloodstream of the organization. Moreover, the social norms and shared values of the school are regularly modelled in deliberate attempts to create a sustained and positive ethos (Kotter, 1995). Thus, the school leader establishes the pedagogical language that is used within a school. If the school leader emphasizes and prioritizes teacher wellness, as a school norm and value, more than likely the teachers in that building will flourish. Although school leadership directly impacts teacher wellness within the profession, leaders are not able to influence every facet of a teachers life.

For the purposes of this literature review, it is important to distinguish the difference between personal and professional wellness. Covey (2008) described the seven habits of highly effective people, and the seventh habit he has identified is *sharpen the saw*. This habit is all about self-care: being sure that a person is in tune with their own health and emotional needs and fulfilling these needs through healthy coping strategies such as healthy eating, regular exercise, and getting enough sleep (Covey, 2008). Although important, personal wellness among teachers is not the focus of this literature review, but rather the literature is focused on the professional wellness of teachers while in their working environment. As part of Dunn's (1961) description of complete well-being, he called for three states of wellness to happen together—"wellness of the body, of the mind, and of the environment" (p. 2). The school is the environment where the

teacher works. Therefore, ensuring an optimal working environment in which a teacher can flourish is a fundamental responsibility of the school leader and addresses the third state of wellness.

Leadership Approaches That Promote Wellness

Ensuring environmental wellness is a major aspect of a school leader's job (Yildirim, 2014). According to educational leadership research by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Canadian Association of Principals in 2014, Canadian principals have an increasingly complex role. Not only do they need to fulfill managerial and administrative roles, but as the LQS states one of their duties is to demonstrate a commitment to the health and well-being of all teachers (Alberta Education, 2018a). Based on the aforementioned studies and descriptions of declining teacher wellness, it is clear that this specific indicator is one that needs to be emphasized by school leaders. Levine (2005) wrote that principals must manage schools while at the same time lead schools through increasing social changes. This balance of duties requires a mindset shift in emphasizing the human element and mental well-being of educators. However, he concluded that school leaders do not innately have the knowledge or skills to do so (Levine, 2005). Providing leaders with teachers' perceptions on what helps with their wellness is important to improve leaders' knowledge around teacher wellness.

There are many types of leadership approaches; however, certain types of approaches support and enhance teacher wellness better than others (Yildirim, 2014). For the purposes of this literature review, the focus will be on three positive leadership approaches that focus on achieving teacher wellness (Haley et al., 2021): servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1998), authentic leadership (Crippen, 2012), and distributed leadership (Timperley, 2005).

Authentic Leadership

Crippen's (2012) construct of authentic leadership addresses concepts such as inclusivity and respect, collaborative and transparent decision-making, a focus on individual and organizational wellness, and a culture of care. In valuing the voices and contributions of all stakeholders and extending respect to all involved a more welcoming atmosphere is created from which collaboration can thrive. The importance that voices are authentically involved in decision-making gives teachers ownership over the vision and its implementation (Haley et al., 2021). Authentic leadership behaviors, many articulated by Avolio and Gardner (2005) as components of authentic leadership theory allow for the establishment of a culture of care that encompasses the school community, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Authentic leaders consider the personal lens, remembering that each teacher has their own lived experiences and will see things differently based on their own personal teaching journeys (Haley et al., 2021).

The Whole Teacher

Building self-efficacy and having a holistic leader in the school has been shown to impact teacher wellness (Adams et al., 2020). Adams et al. (2020) wrote that it is essential to nurture the whole teacher for teachers to effectively nurture the whole child. This example of caring and supporting the teacher supports the concept put forth by Carrington (2019) that if teachers are not okay, then children cannot be okay. An authentic leader is said to be one who establishes a culture of care and focuses on individual wellness (Crippen, 2012). Recognizing that a teacher is a real person and is more than just a teacher is important (Adams et al., 2020). Leaders who know their teachers' interests outside of school, know their talents, understand that teachers are also parents, coaches, cooks, yoga instructors, and more demonstrate to their staff that they understand teachers are people too and have lives that extend beyond the classroom. In a

qualitative study conducted by Adams et al. consisting of five primary schools in England, teachers made it clear that when leaders recognize that they have lives outside work and allow for grace and flexibility when issues arise, they are more willing to go the extra mile to provide best opportunities for the students in their care. One teacher said:

We're not just teachers, we've got family and other things outside of this school that impact massively on us as human beings. And we need to be understanding of that so whilst there are staff who will always go the extra mile, you need to respect why maybe sometimes they can't because of something else that's happening at the time. (Adams et al., 2020, p. 867)

This quotation demonstrates that when teachers are feeling well cared for by their leader, they will give their best to their students.

The importance of leaders supporting a work-life balance was echoed in Kutsyuruba et al.'s (2019b) qualitative study exploring well-being in early career teaching. The purpose of this study was to go deep into the lived experiences of early career teachers and get a broad view of their experiences in terms of their wellness and flourishing. Over 3,000 surveys were collected from teachers throughout nine provinces in Canada, and 36 teachers were interviewed in follow-up phone interviews. The majority of the respondents were from Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. They were invited to share advice regarding their personal development practices for teacher well-being. Four themes emerged from the data: work-life balance, nurturing a positive mindset, reflective inquiry, and 3 C's: consult, collaborate, and connect (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019b). The themes centered around leadership and the administrator's strong skills in supporting work-life balance, promoting a positive mindset, and allowing time for collaboration, reflection, and connection. These factors were ultimately reported to create a strong sense of

teacher wellness. The most frequently mentioned piece of advice given by the participants in the interviews was to maintain a work-life balance. An unwritten rule that exists among teachers is that of having to outwork, outshine, and prove themselves among colleagues. This intense competition can lead to a work-life that is overwhelming and unbalanced. Participants stated that having hobbies was an important aspect of maintaining health (Kutsyruba et al., 2019b). Leaders who acknowledge this and encourage their staff to have healthy boundaries and do something healthy outside of work will help to ease the pressures that teachers have reported they feel. These authentic leadership behaviors of treating the teacher as a whole, knowing them as more than just a teacher, and supporting their work-life balance all contribute to improved teacher wellness.

There is no group of people who are better placed, educated, or experienced as school leaders to ensure teacher wellness is supported and nurtured. In their book *Teacher Wellbeing*, Cherkowski and Walker (2018) encouraged leaders to communicate with their teachers and find out what they need, and then help them take risks to create the conditions necessary for their needs to be met. Principals also need to create the conditions for teachers to flourish and do their best work. This simple form of communication develops trust among those the leaders serve, and trust is earned when actions are consistent with words. Research indicates that reducing teacher stress and intentionally focusing on a culture of wellness is imperative for school administrators and other system leaders (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). Similarly, Shields (2018) described the need to focus on leadership traits and characteristics that are important to creating wellness in the school. In order to create well-being, teachers need to feel they have a say in important matters. Communication is essential; however, there also needs to be follow-through with what has been agreed to. Shields described the follow-through in authentic leadership as the leader asking a

question, the teachers giving a response, and the leader then doing what they said they would do in order to attain the agreed-upon goal.

Authenticity requires that there is consistency and congruency among one's stated values, expressed goals, and actions (Shields, 2018). Thus, positive school leadership aims to grow flourishing conditions through communication for and with teachers; leaders work with staff members to ensure that their actions are consistent with their words. Cherkowski and Walker (2018) asserted that "teacher well-being matters" (p. 23). When the teachers are well, the students are well (Gray et al., 2017). Stress is a regular and perpetual part of a teacher's environment. What need not be persistent are the adverse effects that stress causes. Principals have a moral obligation to ensure schools are places that are flourishing.

To further expand on authentic leadership, Shields (2018) and others describes transactional and transformational leadership behaviors. As described in Shield's text, transactional leadership is seen as a win-win style. Transactional leaders are driven by policy and procedure and work on short-term goals. They prefer a structured approach. They are efficient; however, they can also be described as being opposed to change (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership describes leaders who are motivated to improve. Transformational leaders are strong communicators, as well as genuine and caring, but can be seen as being critical. Transformational leaders can see the big picture and work with stakeholders around a shared vision. These leaders are willing to be agile and will often roll up their sleeves to work side by side with their staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

A study by Van der Vyver et al. (2020) conducted in South Africa looked at the relationship between perceived leadership styles and teacher wellness. In this study, 400 teachers from 20 urban, primary schools completed questionnaires to determine if there was a relationship

between leadership behavior and teachers' well-being. The study found an indication that perceived transformational leadership styles could be associated with higher levels of teacher wellbeing. Teachers who perceived their principals displayed transformational behaviors experienced a high positive affect and low negative affect. In addition, there was a positive relationship between increased transformational leadership and reduced stress. Similarly, the study found teachers experienced an increase in positive affect and a decrease in negative affect when principals were perceived as displaying transactional leadership behaviors, although not to the same extent as when leaders displayed more transformational behaviors. One possible reason noted for the higher rating of transformational leaders was referred to as the humane side of the transformational dimension, referring to those leaders' ability to set aside self-interest and highlight the importance of collective values, beliefs, and purpose and the potential gains in trust that creates (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). Thus, school leaders who want the best for those they serve rather than themselves tend to have teachers who report a more positive affect.

In summary, the types of leadership behaviors that studies have shown to improve teacher wellness are understanding the teacher as a whole human, creating collective efficacy by distributing leadership among staff, supporting teachers to have a healthy work-life balance, and being genuine, caring, and strong communicators (Adams et al., 2020; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Van der Vyver et al., 2020). These behaviors and characteristics are all shown to positively impact teacher wellness but are general in nature. The current study sought to go beyond general terms and identify specific strategies and conditions created by school leaders that improve a teacher's ability to flourish.

Servant Leadership

Bowman (2005), Greenleaf (1977), and Lyman (2012) state that servant leadership comes from the drive to serve others. Olesia et al. (2014) examined the commitment to having leaders create an environment that is supportive for their staff so that they can best support and serve their students. Many researchers (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Liden et al., 2008; Olesia et al., 2014; Russell & Stone, 2002) have noted common characteristics of servant leaders, including valuing community members, staff, and students; listening, having presence and awareness; demonstrating appreciation, humility, and trust; and modelling. Greenleaf (1977) stated that a key ingredient to successful servant leadership is to listen with respect and appreciation for others. Trying to understand conflict by listening to all parties involved is one of the most important elements of service by a leader. Building trust is important to service leadership. A servant leader gains trust through integrity and honesty (Russell & Stone, 2002). There is a reciprocal relationship between school leaders and their staff; staff knowing that a leader will work as a team player through conflict and the leader trusting their staff to be engaged and supportive creates a healthy school environment (Russell & Stone, 2002). A servant leader does not see themselves as the ultimate leader (Greenleaf, 1977). They see themselves as a contributor and a team player, and they seek involvement and answers from the staff they work with. Servant leadership thus comprises an understanding and practice of leadership where the leader places the good of those they lead above their self-interest. Servant leaders gain influence in a nontraditional manner that derives from servanthood itself (Russell & Stone, 2002). The focus of servant leadership is on the service of people rather than control or self-interest. This important focus on the wellness of the teachers, who are considered the most important rather than the organization, is what creates a positive and supportive work environment (Wong et al., 2007).

Servant leadership can help decrease work alienation. Work alienation for teachers is described as feeling unhappy, isolated, and weak within their profession. Teachers who do not feel supported within their work environment can feel alienated at work (Ünsal & Usta, 2021).

To reduce and prevent alienation, servant leader characteristics such as empathy, support, development, and communication are very important. The most important way to prevent the alienation of teachers may be to take their ideas and create several programs ensuring engaged participation from them (Ünsal & Usta, 2021). Ünsal and Usta's (2021) quantitative study of 484 teachers in Turkey found that as teacher perceptions of servant leadership in school leaders increased, the level of work alienation among teachers decreased. The researchers stated that teacher opinions should be sought by leaders, and teachers should participate in school-related decisions. As a result, teachers will be more productive and creative and develop a sense of cooperation, support, trust, and respect. The organizational culture and climate will improve as well as the quality of teacher work-life balance and thus this will prevent teacher alienation (Ünsal & Usta, 2021). Therefore, servant leadership is indeed a leadership approach that not only promotes a favorable working environment but also enhances teachers' ability to flourish within their environment (Olesia et al., 2014). This research intended to discover what specific strategies leaders can do that teachers identify as being examples of demonstrating trust, promoting a work-life balance, and putting the betterment of the whole before the individual.

Kruse and Seashore-Louis (2009) described the increased complexities and pressures of daily operations in schools that require principals to engage in both servant leadership and distributed leadership. Furthermore, they suggested it is essential that principals enhance the leadership in their schools by involving all members of the school community. The LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a) states that principals must develop a shared responsibility for the success of

all students and engage with teachers to build professional and personal capacities and expertise. Interacting and distributing responsibility demonstrates a belief in staff that they are competent, which builds staff efficacy (Kruse & Seashore-Louis, 2009).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is a shift from looking at one heroic leader standing atop a hierarchy, molding their school community to fit their own purpose or desires, to a more achievable, sustainable way of looking at leadership (Camburn et al. 2003). Often called shared leadership, team leadership, or democratic leadership, this type of leadership distributes activities and interactions across multiple people and situations (Spillane, 2005). The idea of distributed leadership has only been seriously considered in research since the mid-1990s (Timperley, 2005). As defined by Copland (2003), distributed leadership is “a set of functions or qualities shared across a much broader segment of the school community that encompasses administrators, teachers and other professionals and community members both internal and external to the school” (p. 376).

For schools to show improvement, run well, and flourish, it takes the efforts of more than just the principal. A distributed leadership model occurs when the principal encourages, supports, and promotes staff members to build leadership capacity and assume responsibilities to improve the school (Timperley, 2006). Showing confidence in teachers by allowing them to demonstrate their strengths, be creative with their ideas, and be heard when making decisions is the most valuable gift a school leader can give (Whitaker, 2012). When teachers feel valued and that the work they are doing matters, they are more likely to flourish and be well (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). When leaders are confident in the teachers they work with, teachers become more confident in themselves.

In 2016, the U.S. Department for Education published Le Floch et al.'s *Case Studies of Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants: Final Report*. This mixed-method study collected data through surveys and interviews. In six out of seven schools, teachers said they made decisions that could impact their school improvement process. Some teachers said they felt validated for their input, and their ideas were collaboratively evaluated to determine schoolwide steps for improvement. Other teachers felt that the improvement process was not a top-down mandate but part of a shared decision-making process (Le Floch et al., 2016). This sense of feeling valued and a part of a working environment where teachers are supported in growing professionally and living their dreams of positively influencing students is what Kutsyruba et al. (2019b) said is a key element of professional flourishing.

A caution discussed by Timperley (2005) with regards to distributed leadership is “how the leadership activities are distributed and the ways in which the distribution is effective” (p. 397). Distributed leadership, in some cases, can run the risk of a “greater distribution of incompetence” (Timperley, 2005, p. 417). General ideas about distributed leadership within the literature such as leaders do not have all the answers, it requires a collaborative approach to decision-making, and capacity building should occur among all staff (Camburn et al., 2003; Spillane & Sherer, 2004; Timperley, 2005) are good to understand, but what would be better is knowing what specific actions, strategies, and conditions leaders can provide to teachers that they perceive to make them feel more a part of the bigger picture and therefore improve their professional wellness.

Summary

Teachers across the country are struggling (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020, Froese-Germain, 2014; Gallup, 2014; Gray & Taie, 2015; Kyriacou, 2001; R.A. Malatest & Associates

Ltd., 2015). Teacher wellness is declining due to an increase in the complexity of student needs (Briere et al., 2008; New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003), an increase in workload demands (Belliveau et al., 2002; Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2007; Dibbon, 2004; Naylor, 2001; Smaller et al., 2005; Sutton & Huberty, 1984), and the COVID-19 pandemic (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021, Kim et al., 2022, Sokal et al., 2020b). These negative impacts can be seen in the number of teachers reporting an increase in stress and burnout (Gallup, 2014; Kyriacou, 2001) as well as in the mental health check-in survey that found the number of teachers in Canada who plan to leave the profession 1 year after the pandemic has more than doubled (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020). The issue of teacher wellness needs to be addressed or this decline in teacher wellness will continue to negatively impact the quality of education that students receive (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) as well as the economics of the education system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004).

The school leader plays a major role in supporting teacher wellness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Whitaker, 2012). "If the teachers are not OK then the students will not be OK" (Carrington, 2019, p.164). Teachers are the key component of the education system, both from a human element perspective as well as an economic perspective (Ryan et al., 2017). There is a need for leaders to ensure teachers are well. The leadership of the school principal directly influences teachers' experience of well-being (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). Thus, it is important that school leaders understand how they can effectively impact teacher wellness. This means more than understanding the leadership approaches and styles that are out there and more specifically understanding what teachers perceive to be high-impact wellness strategies and leveraging those. School leaders are extremely busy and knowing more about what teachers' perceptions are regarding high-impact strategies and conditions will help

leaders to focus their energy and time on those strategies and conditions that make the greatest impact. Chapter 3 details the methodology and processes utilized to examine the problem outlined in Chapter 1 and supported by the literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative, intrinsic case study is to understand rural, elementary teachers' perceptions of leadership strategies and how those strategies impact teacher wellness and ability to flourish as professionals. Two models were utilized to create a conceptual framework that grounded this study. Dunn's (1961) wellness framework and the six elements of wellness served as the primary conceptual framework while. Cherkowski and Walker's (2020) conceptual model for flourishing schools was added to create a more robust lens specific to teacher wellness. The LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a), as the legislated standard for school leadership in the province of Alberta, also functions as a lens for analysis of participant responses and documents related to leadership practices that impact teacher wellness and professional flourishing.

Research Question

The purpose of this case study is to understand rural elementary teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of school leadership strategies in promoting teacher wellness. The research question for this study is "How do rural, elementary teachers perceive their professional wellness is supported by school leaders?"

Research Design

An intrinsic case study was used to explore the experiences of 53 elementary school teachers from three districts, who had a minimum of at least one year of teaching experience. The study utilized both questionnaires and focus groups to elicit participant responses. Questionnaire responses were analyzed for patterns and along with the focus group, responses were examined for emergent themes relevant to the research question.

Rationale for Methodology

An intrinsic case study was the method for this analysis. It fits both the process of inquiry and the product of the inquiry (Stake, 2008). An intrinsic case study is described as a case in which the case itself is of interest. The case for this study was rural Alberta school teachers with at least one year of teaching experience and their perceptions of current leadership strategies used to promote wellness (Stake, 2008). This case study was exploratory in nature because there was no predetermined outcome and I was asking “what” and “how” questions (Yin, 2014). The intrinsic case study was appropriate to gain an in-depth description of a social phenomenon. In this case the social phenomenon is professional wellness. Data collection methods chosen enabled the researcher to:

- explore significant features of the case,
- create plausible interpretations of what is found,
- test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations,
- construct a worthwhile argument,
- relate the argument to any relevant research in the literature,
- convey convincingly to an audience this argument, and
- provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments. (Bassegy, 2012, p. 156)

Aligning with Stake’s (2008) definition, this case study focused on the case as the point of interest. “Intrinsic designs aim to develop what is perceived to be the case’s own issues, contexts, and interpretations, its thick description” (Stake, 2008, p. 128). Stake noted that case studies focus on complex, potentially problematic, issues, and relationships, which aligns with the issue of decreasing teacher wellness in Alberta outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

Bounds of the Case

This case was bounded by elementary teachers with at least one year of teaching experience within three rural Alberta school districts. Specifically, this case focused on teacher wellness, as it impacts the ability to perform professional duties and flourish. Of particular interest are leadership strategies or conditions as they impact teacher wellness. While additional factors may exist that are not the result of school leader strategies or conditions, these factors, while contributing to an individual's personal wellness, are beyond the scope of this study.

Participants

Four rural Central Alberta school divisions were invited to participate in this study. Three agreed to participate. Participation from 30 elementary teachers from each of these districts ($N = 90$) was desired; however, only 53 teachers across the three divisions responded to the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the participating institutions and teachers in this study were anonymized (Yin, 2018). All teachers selected for participation were working in a school with an elementary population, which in Alberta is defined as prekindergarten through Grade 6.

All teachers who participated had at least 1 year of teaching experience at the time of responding to the questionnaire. Participants were asked to speak to the types of leadership strategies they have experienced that they felt were highly impactful, therefore at least one year of teaching experience was required for participants to knowledgeably respond to this. The other demographic that was collected was participant gender. Only two basic demographics were collected, because this study was exploratory in nature, and was open to as many participants as possible. The majority of participants ($n = 35$) reported over 16 years of teaching experience and the remaining participants ($n = 18$) reported 1 to 15 years of teaching experience. The majority of

participants were female ($n = 41$) and the other remaining ($n = 12$) were male. No participants responded as *prefer not to say*.

Purposeful convenience sampling was used in this research. This type of nonrandom sampling was used because the target population met certain practical criteria, including that they were easily accessible, available within the time constraints of the investigation, willing to participate, and currently employed within the geographical bounds of this case (Dörnyei, 2007). Convenience sampling methods place primary emphasis on generalizability, which means that the knowledge gained was representative of the population from which the sample was taken (Etikan et al., 2016).

Context: Rural Alberta

Alberta Education has legislated practice standards for teachers and school leaders that both describe and mandate best practices. Within the competencies and indicators of each standard, elements of wellness are identified. The LQS (Alberta Education, 2018a), a framework for school leader practice, lists wellness-related competencies and indicators including building effective relationships, collaborating with others to ensure engagement and well-being, and recognizing staff accomplishments. The LQS standard was written into law in Alberta in 2019.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

In qualitative research, the interpretation of findings is impacted by the biases and experiences of the researcher. It is important to acknowledge potential biases before beginning a study (Creswell, 2014). My positionality as the researcher includes 17 years of experience working with students and alongside teachers in K–12 settings. With a master's degree in counselling psychology, I have a strong interest in mental health and the overall wellness of human beings.

In 2020, currently serving as the vice-principal, I was asked to be the acting principal of my elementary school, working alongside 64 staff members and 600 students, and was charged with guiding and supporting staff through a health pandemic. At this time, I was working on my doctorate, my brother was sick and dying of cancer, and I was approached daily by teachers who were stressed, burned out, fatigued from increased workload demands and student complexities, and struggling with their own wellness. This experience made me reflect on how important teacher wellness is and how much teachers go through in their personal lives. After this 4-month term (September–December), I knew that focusing on ensuring teachers’ wellness was going to be a mission of mine. During my time as a school leader, I spent many hours, particularly at the beginning of the school year, tying little bows on packs of Extra brand gum and coming up with creative sayings like “We hope your year is *extraordinary*” or “*Wel-GUM* back.” These little tasks would take hours, and it made me wonder how impactful these strategies were to overall teacher wellness. I am sure some people thought they were cute and kind, but I wondered if these were the kinds of strategies, actions, or conditions, that actually impacted teacher wellness in a positive way. Thus started my doctoral endeavor to find the answer.

I have aspirations for further leadership positions both in and out of my school division. Throughout my career, in both vice-principal and principal roles, I have mentored teachers experiencing wellness barriers such as mental health, fatigue and burnout, stress, and worry. I will continue to advocate, support, and empower teachers to ensure they are well for the rest of my career. As this is the lens through which I see, I have taken steps in the collection and analysis of data to bracket that bias, and where possible, minimize its influence on any findings derived from the data.

Data Collection and Instruments

This intrinsic case study used a multiple-phase design for data collection. Data were collected during phase 1 using a questionnaire including both Likert-type and open-ended questions and during phase 2 by conducting a follow-up focus group. The questionnaire allowed participants to provide their responses about which dimensions of wellness they perceive to be most important and to rate specific components of creating flourishing work environments. It also provided participants two opportunities to share high-impact leadership strategies that have positively impacted their wellness as well as give recommendations regarding what leaders should do to best support teacher wellness. The follow-up focus group allowed for a thorough discussion between participants to share their perceptions and provide a better understanding about how certain leadership strategies and conditions highly impact teacher wellness.

Phase 1

Questionnaire Development. The questionnaire was developed through an iterative cycle of development and revisions. A thorough review of the literature initiated the first draft. Questionnaire prompts for the specific leadership strategies and conditions used in the questionnaire were generated from the literature (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Crippen, 2012; Dunn 1961; Greenleaf, 1971) and revised using ideas from the Ed.D. leadership cohort. Through a process of peer review, the questionnaire was reviewed by non-participant doctoral cohort members who provided feedback on rewording questions for clarity and item credibility and reliability. The draft questionnaire was pilot tested by five nonparticipating teachers from the school where I work for general feedback (Dillman et al., 2009). The final instrument included two demographic questions, three Likert-type questions, and two open-ended questions

(Appendix A). An initial preamble was added with definitions for key terms to ensure clarity for the participants.

The questionnaire utilized a 4-point Likert-type scale for questions pertaining to how impactful specific leadership strategies are to their wellness. The 4-point scale was labelled 1 = *not at all impactful* to 4 = *highly impactful*. Sample prompts from this section include: “A leader who provides me opportunities to give input and feedback on the goals and vision of the whole school” and “A leader who provides me with opportunities to collaborate with my colleagues. The same 4-point Likert-type scale was used for questions pertaining to the importance of leaders focusing on the six dimensions of wellness. Sample prompts from this section include “Emotional” and “Intellectual.” A sliding scale was used for an item specifically addressing the three components of flourishing environments (Cherkowski & Walker 2020). The sliding scale included ratings of 1 = *do not agree*, 3 = *somewhat agree*, and 5 = *very much agree*.

The first open-ended question prompted teacher participants to list strategies, actions, or conditions that leaders have used that they perceive to positively impact their wellness. The second open-ended question asked teacher participants what one recommendation they would share with school leaders about how to best support teacher wellness. Table 1 provides a visual summary that includes the types of questions that were included in the questionnaire. There were a total of 22 questions on the questionnaire.

Table 1*Questionnaire Components*

Type of Questions	<i>n</i>	<i>Likert-type Scales Used</i>
Demographic	2	
Likert-Type (specific strategies)	9	1-4
Likert-Type (dimensions of wellness)	6	1-4
Sliding Scale (Flourishing schools)	3	1-5
Open-Ended	2	

Questionnaire Implementation. The questionnaire was distributed to the elementary teachers on September 12, 2022, via email from their superintendent, on my behalf, with an initial deadline of October 8, 2022. Participants gave consent prior to answering the questionnaire by checking a box after reading the consent statement (Appendix A). This questionnaire was developed using a Google Form, then transferred to Qualtrics for a more professional feel. The researcher incentivized the participants by offering each participant the opportunity to voluntarily put their name in for a draw for a \$50 prepaid Mastercard after completing the questionnaire. This questionnaire ultimately remained open until October 22, 2022 in an attempt to elicit more responses.

Phase 2

The second data collection strategy consisted of focus group interviews with survey respondents (Patton, 2002). Participants were selected for the focus group from participants who indicated they would participate on the questionnaire. Purposeful random sampling was used to increase the credibility of the results and to gain knowledge of a wide variety of teachers' perceptions (Palinkas et al., 2015). Focus group interviews were used in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact and effectiveness that leaders have on teacher wellness and

flourishing. Focus groups allow for the social construction of responses to questions as participants are able to build off of comments made by other group members (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2005) states that focus groups work well when those being interviewed are similar to one another. The participants in the focus group were similar in that they were all female elementary school teachers. Another consideration for the use of focus groups over one-to-one interviews was the limitation of time to collect information for this study. A saving in time was a benefit of focus group interviews (Creswell, 2005). Eight people agreed to be involved in a focus group and six people confirmed they would log into the Google Meet session on October 30, 2022; however, only four participants joined the meeting. The focus group size remained consistent with the four to six participants recommended by Creswell (2005).

Focus Group Protocol Development. A draft focus group protocol was created and then modified based on early analysis of questionnaire data. The intent of the focus group questions was to gain a deeper understanding about what specific strategies, conditions, and actions leaders provide that teachers perceive to highly impact their wellness, and also to learn more about how and why certain strategies impact some teachers more than others. The focus group questions also delved deeper into the three components of flourishing schools and how each of these impacted teachers' ability to flourish at work. The final draft protocol was reviewed with the dissertation committee chair and with seven doctoral cohort members to assess question clarity, and credibility and reliability of the protocol. The protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Focus Group Protocol Administration. The focus group was piloted online by three cohort members and based on their feedback the following modifications were made prior to administration: (a) adding of focus group norms to the preamble, (b) use of the hand-up feature for participants who want to talk or share, (c) ask participants to identify only as *participant x* to

preserve confidentiality of responses in the written transcript (d) posting of the question in the chat for participants to refer back to if they forgot the specific wording and (e) use of the backup record feature on Google Meet in addition to the recording feature of the transcription application Otter (<https://otter.ai>).

Four participants showed up for the focus group on October 30, 2022, at 7 p.m. via Google Meet. Each of the three school divisions was represented within this focus group. Verbal consent was collected prior to the start of the focus group after a review of the consent statement which was posted to the chat (see Appendix B). Participants were reminded that they could keep their cameras off if they were more comfortable. The focus group took approximately 1 hour. With the permission of all participants, the focus group was recorded in order to ensure that all of the voices and comments were heard. The recording was then transcribed through the use of Otter. Transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy by the participants and any comments that may identify a participant, school or district were omitted within 2 weeks following the focus group.

Timeline

The following was the timeline for this study:

- July 2022: Defended proposal
- July 2022: Acquired Institutional Review Board approval to conduct research with human participants
- September 2022: Phase 1 questionnaire sent out to teachers
- October 2022: Phase 2 focus group held with teachers
- November 2022: Analyzed data
- December 31, 2022: Articulated findings (Chapter 4)
- January 31, 2023: Discussed findings (Chapter 5)

- February 18, 2023: Draft of dissertation study was sent to chair
- March 7, 2023: Draft of dissertation study was sent to committee
- March 23, 2023: Defended final dissertation via Zoom

Data Analysis

The research findings include data from the questionnaire, focus group, and researcher's log. The researcher's log includes journal entries detailing the research process, analytic memos that serve as a check against researcher bias and inform the warrants for pattern codes and themes, and any questions that arose during the analysis process. "Reviewing and then discussing how biases, values, and experiences impact emerging understandings is actually the heart of being reflective in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 229). This allowed for greater transparency as well as tracking the research processes and progress. The two data sources, the questionnaire and focus group transcript, were analyzed to reveal categories that lead to overarching themes.

The two Likert-type scale responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using Qualtrics analysis software. The data from these items is ordinal in nature, and therefore only basic descriptive statistical methods were applied. Data from the short answer questions from the questionnaire, along with the focus group transcript, were analyzed using a two-cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2016) resulting in emergent themes.

Coding

To organize and interpret the emergent elements and themes from the findings, Saldaña's (2016) first cycle, transition, and second cycle coding methods were used.

First cycle was completed using open coding, which is recommended for "researchers learning how to code data and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña,

2016, p. 106). The goal of this open coding was to hear participant voice and to help support codes that emerged, in vivo coding was used to capture significant verbatim quotes. Each in vivo code was assigned a number (participant and line) to make retrieval easier during later analysis.

Cycle 1 analysis included provisional *a priori* codes determined through the review of literature, Dunn's (1961) conceptual framework, and the researcher's previous knowledge and experiences (Saldaña, 2016). These *a priori* codes were used only as they were confirmed by participant data in the transcripts and survey data. The *a priori* codes were not carried forward into second cycle analysis.

Transition to Second Cycle: Pattern Coding

Code mapping, identification of outliers, and code collapsing occurred during the transition phase. Code mapping is “manually organizing and assembling the codes developed from first cycle process” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 281). For the mapping process, open codes and all 89 in vivo were utilized. Commonalities were looked for among the in vivo codes and were grouped according to their similarities. This process was followed for all narrative data. Following the transition phase and prior to Cycle 2, four outlier codes (mentioned by only one respondent) from the two open-ended questions were identified. These outliers were not carried forward into creation of categories in Cycle 2.

Second Cycle Coding: Theming

After the codes were grouped into 27 categories, theming was used to reduce the categories into three important themes, each with an articulated warrant showing the logic used in creating each theme. This process was repeated and checked for accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

The research received approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Portland in July of 2022. Instructions for voluntary participation in the questionnaire included the approximate time necessary to complete the instrument, the categories of information being sought, and a statement that a participant could exit the questionnaire and end their participation in the study at any point. Participants were asked to voluntarily enter their name and email address if they wished to volunteer for possible focus group participation. Each participant signed a consent form indicating they understood how their data would be collected and used. Participant identities (both individual and institutional) were protected using numerically assigned codes, and all identifying information about their respective schools of employment was omitted from the study.

Instructions for voluntary participation for the focus group were given verbally prior to the focus group starting. Options to leave the camera off and use a pseudonym as a screen name were given. The initial instructions also included the approximate time it would take to complete the focus group and the information being sought. As I am in a leadership position within one of the schools within the participating division, that school was not included in this study. The participants in the study were not asked to reveal their school division to ensure anonymity.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the credibility and confirmability, transferability, and dependability of the study process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 2009). The standards for quality in qualitative research were adhered to throughout the design, analysis, and data gathering phases of this study. Triangulation of data from the questionnaire, the focus group, and the literature were used to address issues of trustworthiness.

Credibility and Confirmability

Credibility was established through a detailed description of the analysis and interpretive process of the data regarding the target research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Questionnaire development involved a pilot testing process by nonparticipants before implementation (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Triangulation of the research data using a rigorous research methodology and controls for bias (researcher analytic notes and researcher journal) increased the credibility and confirmability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Bracketing my potential preconceptions using reflective memos in a journal during the data collection process also increased the rigor of this case study (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Transferability

Through purposive sampling, I ensured participation was clearly delineated within the bounds of the case and that participants had the knowledge and experience required to participate. A description of the warrants leading to my findings using a systematic and detailed research design is provided, and the results may be transferable to other districts, school leaders, and teachers with a similar context.

Dependability

Adhering to the outlined research process and remaining consistent throughout the study with data collection records, documentation, and data coding and analysis ensured a high level of dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998). Many variables identified through the data collection or analysis process were documented through bracketing, anecdotal notes, and reflections captured in a research journal.

Summary

This chapter outlined the purpose and methodology of this qualitative intrinsic case study, which investigated teachers' perceptions of leadership strategies, actions, and conditions that Alberta school leaders use to promote teacher wellness and professional flourishing. The findings will be presented in Chapter 4, and the subsequent analysis and discussion of findings provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to identify leadership strategies and conditions that support and enhance teachers' well-being and ability to flourish in their work as professionals in rural Alberta elementary schools. The research question that guides this study is "How do rural, elementary teachers perceive their professional wellness is supported by school leaders?" This chapter is organized into five parts: participant demographics, questionnaire findings, which include interrelated findings, focus group findings, consideration of themes, and the conclusion. The findings were organized this way because the initial analysis was done on the questionnaire, which included the Likert-type questions and open-ended questions, in order to inform the deeper discussion and questions that were used in the focus group. Following that, all the categories from both sources were then considered together to help inform the themes.

Participant Demographics

Specific participant selection was outlined and explained in Chapter 3. What follows is the statistical demographics of the actual participants who completed the questionnaire and participated in the focus group. The questionnaire was distributed to prospective participants across three rural Alberta school divisions, all of whom were elementary school teachers with at least 1 year of teaching experience. Of the estimated 300 prospective participants, 125 participants opened the questionnaire; however, only 53 completed the entire questionnaire. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the participant. These statistics show the majority of participants were female and had 16 or more years of experience.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

Demographic	<i>n</i>	%
Years of teaching experience		
1–5 years	4	8
6–10 years	5	9
11–15 years	9	17
16 + years	35	66
Gender		
Female	41	77
Male	12	23

Note. *N* = 53.

Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire findings are broken out into the two Likert-type questions, followed by the two open-ended questions, and finally the slider-scale question related to flourishing.

Likert-Type Questions on Impact of Wellness Strategies

The first Likert-type question asked participants to rate how impactful each dimension of wellness (Dunn, 1961) was on their overall professional wellness: “Please indicate from your perspective how important it is for a leader to focus on the following dimensions in order to promote your professional wellness and a favorable working environment.” The results from this question are shown in Table 3. The *N* values ranged from 51 to 53 as some participants did not answer all items.

Table 3*Questionnaire Results: Level of Impact on Dimensions of Wellness*

Dimensions of wellness	Not impactful (%)	Somewhat impactful (%)	Moderately impactful (%)	Highly impactful (%)
Physical	8	30	42	21
Intellectual	0	16	39	45
Emotional	2	8	15	75
Social	0	9	23	68
Spiritual	15	43	34	8
Environmental	0	19	43	38

Note. *N* values ranged from 51 to 53. Due to rounding not all rows add to exactly 100%.

Teachers perceived leaders who focus on the emotional element to be the most highly impactful (75%). Examples of this dimension provided on the questionnaire included receiving praise or positive notes.

Almost 68% of teachers perceived that leaders who focus on the social element were highly impactful on their wellness, and all 53 participants responded that this dimension is impactful in some way. Examples of this dimension on the questionnaire included providing staff luncheons, building strong relationships, and participating in the community.

Intellectual wellness, which was described to participants on the questionnaire as providing rich professional development (PD), was rated as highly impactful by 45% of participants. Although not as many participants rated this dimension as highly impactful, no one indicated that it is not impactful at all, meaning that all 51 participants who responded to this question perceived that leaders who focus on intellectual wellness positively impact them in some way. Similarly, 38% of participants rated the environmental element as highly impactful,

and no one indicated that it was not impactful. Environmental wellness was described to participants as air quality, safety, and comfort.

The dimensions perceived by teachers to have the least impact were spiritual and physical. These two categories had the lowest number of participants rate them as highly impactful, and 15% and 8% of participants, respectively, responded that the spiritual and physical dimensions had no impact at all. Physical wellness was described to participants as a planned walk or nutritious snack, and spiritual wellness was described as acknowledging cultural holidays. Further implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

The second Likert-type question asked participants to rate how impactful specific leadership strategies were on their wellness: “For the following 8 questions, please indicate to what degree you think each specific strategy is positively impactful to your professional wellness. The results from this question are shown in Table 4. The top three leadership strategies perceived by participants to be highly impactful were taking time to celebrate successes within the school (73%), supporting personal situations (73%), and giving praise to show teachers they are appreciated (67%).

Table 4

Perceived Impact of Leadership Strategies on Professional Wellness

Leadership strategy	Not impactful (%)	Somewhat impactful (%)	Moderately impactful (%)	Highly impactful (%)
A leader who provides me with opportunities to collaborate with my colleagues.	4	9	31	56
A leader who provides me opportunities to give input and feedback on the goals and vision of the whole school.	0	19	42	38
A leader who supports my personal situations.	0	0	27	73

Leadership strategy	Not impactful (%)	Somewhat impactful (%)	Moderately impactful (%)	Highly impactful (%)
A leader who visits my classroom and gives me constructive feedback on my teaching practice.	2	13	48	37
A leader who praises me to show that I am appreciated.	2	8	24	67
A leader who provides time to laugh and play together as a staff. Example: staff parties, staff meals, draws, treat days, coffee carts, etc.	0	12	27	62
A leader who ensures PD is meaningful and valuable.	0	8	29	63
A leader who takes time to celebrate successes within the school.	2	0	25	73
A leader who ensures my classroom is clean, safe, and suitable for learning.	0	12	37	51

Note. PD = professional development. Sample sizes ranged from 51 to 53. Due to rounding, not all rows add to exactly 100%.

All the listed strategies from this question were rated impactful in some way; however, four were noted by some teachers as having no impact at all. Those were taking time to celebrate successes, giving praise to show appreciation, visiting classrooms and giving constructive feedback on teaching practice, and providing time to collaborate with colleagues. An interesting finding is that two strategies that were rated as highly impactful were also the same strategies that some teachers indicated had no impact on their wellness at all. The implication of this finding is further discussed in Chapter 5. Below is a list of how participants ranked the strategies from most (1) to least (8) impactful (see also Appendix D):

1. a leader who supports my personal situations
2. a leader who celebrates successes within the school

3. a leader who ensures professional development is meaningful and valuable
4. a leader who provides me time to laugh and play together as a staff
5. a leader who praises me to show me I am appreciated
6. a leader who ensures my classroom is clean, safe, and suitable for learning
7. a leader who visits my classroom and gives me constructive feedback on my teaching practice
8. a leader who provides me opportunities to give input and feedback on the goals and vision of the school

Open-Ended Questions on Participant Perceptions and Preferences

The questionnaire had two short answer questions. No prompts or choices were provided to participants. The first short answer question asked participants “What things have school leaders (both current and past) done to positively support your professional wellness? Feel free to use bullet points, write as much as you like.” Holistic analysis of this data initially revealed 150 codes; however, through code collapsing, this was reduced to 89 including in vivo codes. These codes translated into 25 categories and eventually to three themes.

Many participant responses indicated support for the emotional element as indicated by P29 who stated, “Going out of their way to show their appreciation and care, sending me a nice email or buying me a hot drink, after a hard day” which was echoed by P28 remarked, “checking in on me to make sure I’m OK.” Other notable responses offering evidence of the importance of the emotional element include P41 who opined, “walking into my class to talk to me and the kids,” and P40 similarly added, “dropping into classrooms to see how we are doing.” P35 also supported this by adding “check-ins, stops by to chat and see how things are going.” Many participants mentioned praise and acknowledgement but P34 summed it up nicely by saying

“praise and acknowledge me for the amount of work I am doing in my classroom and for my students.” There were many participant responses that supported the second highest rated dimension, the social dimension. Open-ended responses like P26 who said, “planned staff gatherings,” and P1 who stated, “encouraging participation in social events,” and P40 who said “providing staff meals” all supported the importance of the social element.

The third highest rated dimension on the questionnaire was intellectual wellness. Participants supporting this in the first open-ended question said the following. Participant 45 said “post resources for us in the staff room,” and similarly Participant 47 said “provide us with a wealth of resources.” Participant 27 said “allowing for professional development opportunities,” and Participant 7 said “PD that is purposeful and useful.” Although the environmental dimension was not as impactful as other dimensions, this element was singled out as being important by Participant 10, who said that a leader who “ensured that my physical space was safe and followed up immediately if there were any concerns” positively impacted their wellness. Some participants supported wellness initiatives and wellness professional development, this was evident by P43 who said they really appreciated “divisional wellness days, and divisional wellness emails that include healthy recipes and positive messages about positive mental health suggestions” and P23 who said “district wellness days.” This was also supported by P45 who said “set aside PD specifically for wellness activities,” as well as P24 who said “a division wide wellness day where we all get together and sign up for wellness activities.”

Finally, there were many comments about food. Participants in this study mentioned food or drink of some kind in their open-ended comments several times. Participants 41, 35, 20, and 25 opined respectively, “bringing around coffee and cookies randomly on a cart,” “brings treats, drinks, and snacks or cooks a staff breakfast,” “snack and drink cart,” and coffee gift cards.” It

was clear from these findings that teachers who have had leaders who bring them an enjoyable treat found that was impactful to their wellness.

Following the transition phase involving code mapping and code collapsing, second cycle pattern coding further narrowed the data into 25 categories. The codes, code frequencies, warrants, and categories are displayed in Table 5. During the transition phase, following Cycle 1 coding, three codes were identified as outliers: (a) fair supervision, (b) space to act professionally, and (c) providing leadership opportunities. These codes were named only once and not repeated by any other participants and therefore were left out of second cycle analysis.

Table 5

Categories with Warrants for High-Impact Leadership Strategies

Cycle 1 codes	Code frequency	Warrant	Cycle 2 Categories
Food/Meals/Treats/Snacks/ Coffee carts/Lunches	15	All responses named some form of food or drink.	Food & drink
Give time on PD days/PD for wellness/Work time of PD/ Meaningful PD/ Motivating PD/District-wide PD days	13	Responses mentioned meaningful and motivating PD and leaving time to work on PD.	Professional development
Uninterrupted prep time/ Awareness of impact on teacher time/Time off when needed/Reduce workload/ Give time to breathe/Respect my time/30 min. daily prep/ Alleviating workload/ Brief staff meetings	12	The ideas of honoring and respecting staff time, reducing workload, or providing more time were common.	Time
Check-ins/Make sure I'm OK/Interest in my life	12	Making sure staff are OK and asking about their life are check-ins.	Check-ins
Recognition/Appreciation/Staff acknowledgement/Praise/ Give thanks/Verbal	11	All related to acknowledgement.	Recognition & acknowledgement

Cycle 1 codes	Code frequency	Warrant	Cycle 2 Categories
appreciation/Positive feedback and encouragement			
Intentional team building/Staff connections/Staff gatherings/staff parties	9	Parties, gatherings, events, and bringing staff together were mentioned.	Social events
Staff wellness activities/ District-wide wellness days/ Staff wellness/School-wide wellness	7	All mentioned wellness in some way, both at district and school level.	Wellness
Listen/Space to be heard/ Opinions to be heard/Safe environment/Consider others' ideas	7	All responses mentioned listening to the opinions and ideas of staff.	Listen
Clear, concise communication/ Good communication/ Clearly communicate goals	7	All mentioned communicating in some way.	Clear communication
Notes of thanks/Thank-you notes/Kind notes/ Handwritten notes	5	All responses mentioned a note of some kind.	Notes
Cover class/Cover recess	5	All ideas mentioned coverage of some kind.	Coverage
Support in the class when needed/Visit my classroom	4	All mentioned the leader in the classroom.	Time in classrooms
Time to collaborate with colleagues	4	All included words about collaboration.	Collaboration
Generative dialogue/ Coaching in a positive way/ Constructive criticism	4	Generative dialogue and giving feedback are considered coaching.	Coaching
Family-first attitude	3	Three participants wrote verbatim "family first mentality/attitude."	Family-first thinking
Don't question leaves/Trust	3	Not questioning teacher leaves shows trust.	Trust
Approachable/Open-door policy	3	Open-door policies create a feeling of approachability.	Approachable
Clear expectations/No surprises	3	Both codes involve clarity.	Clear expectations

Cycle 1 codes	Code frequency	Warrant	Cycle 2 Categories
Connect authentically/ Meaningful relationships/ Positive relationships	3	Relationships are all about creating positive, authentic connections.	Relationships
Support with parents/Have teachers back with parents	2	Support specifically with parents was mentioned.	Support with parents
Provide resources	2	Both noted providing resources.	Resources
Physical space is safe/Provide quiet, comfortable space	2	These ideas are about the physical workspace.	Physical space
Built in mental health/ support mental health	2	Both codes involve mental health.	Mental health
Sense of humor/ Upbeat & positive	2	Both positivity and humor were mentioned.	Positive & humor
Flexibility to change/ Extend deadlines	2	Extending a deadline shows flexibility.	Flexibility

Note. PD = professional development.

The second short answer question asked participants to “list what one recommendation they would share with school leaders about how to best support teacher wellness.” Holistic analysis of this data initially revealed 46 descriptive codes; however, through code collapsing, this was reduced to 17 based on commonalities between the in vivo codes noted. Data analysis of the 17 codes narrowed to eight pattern codes or categories. The codes, code frequencies, warrants, and categories for this question are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6*Open-Ended Question: Recommendations to Leaders from Teachers*

Cycle 1 codes	Code frequency	Warrant	Cycle 2 Categories
Listen to teachers/Ask for staff input/Engage staff in decision-making/Seek where your teachers are at/Opportunities to share	12	None of these ideas can happen unless a leader listens to their staff.	Listen
Time on PD days/Increase collaboration time/Allow time to work/Time to breathe & recharge/Sufficient time to implement change/Don't voluntell/Reasonable expectations	9	All statements had something to do with time, whether it was needing more time or allotting time to get things done.	Time
Reduce workload/Reduce workload and mandates	5	All ideas referred to reducing the workload.	Reduce workload
Social gatherings/Bring staff together	3	Social gatherings help to build school community.	Build school community
Quick check-ins/Authentic relationships/Make connections	3	Check-ins and connections ensure good staff relations.	Relationships
Clear expectations/Open communication	3	Both ideas mentioned being clear and communication.	Clarity & communication
Support teachers/Supportive	2	Each item mentioned support.	Supportive
Build trust/Create a safe, trusting environment	2	Both these ideas are about trust.	Trust

Note. PD = professional development.

There were many useful recommendations generated by participants when responding to this question. Participant 18 said, “Develop authentic relationships that elicit a caring and supportive environment.” Participant 19 said, “Show compassion and empathy towards your staff.” This notion was further supported by Participant 32, who said, “Understand that we are all doing the best that we can do with what is given.” An interesting finding from this second open-ended question is that only three participants mentioned the social dimension of wellness.

Participant 35 wrote, “Give teachers time for social gatherings and ways to boost morale,” and Participant 37 similarly said, “Keep encouraging staff family/community, coming together as a whole group and just chatting is very good for the soul.” Finally, Participant 43 supported this by saying “promoting community both within the school and our greater community.” As the social dimension was rated as the second most impactful dimension on the questionnaire, I expected that more than three comments would have mentioned it. Again, this finding is discussed more in Chapter 5.

During the Cycle 1 coding of the second open-ended question, six codes were identified as outliers: (a) be fair and equal to all, (b) respect & acknowledge, (c) give opportunities to share, (d) model integrity, (e) opportunities for rich PD, and (f) assign good fit tasks for teachers. These codes were named only once and not repeated by any other participants and therefore were left out of second cycle analysis. The final stage of analysis included axial coding, which included data from both open-ended questions as well as the focus group and narrowed the categories into three themes discussed later in this chapter. A summary of high-impact leadership strategies that teachers recommended can be found in Appendix E.

Interrelated Findings

Many of the open-ended responses related to the six dimensions of wellness in some way. Consistently, comments from first open-ended question also supported the findings from Likert Question number 2 which asked participants to rate how impactful specific leadership strategies were on their wellness. The top three rated strategies; A leader who supports my personal situations, a leader who takes time to celebrate successes within the school and a leader who praises me to show that I am appreciated, were all supported by the open-ended comments. Supporting comments included P15 who said both “recognizing staff members on a job well

done and giving recognition when it is due,” and “reminded me that although teaching and school are important, family responsibilities (specifically when my family member was diagnosed with a terminal illness) are MORE important and it is ok to put those people first,” this was echoed by participant 18 who stated “being kind and aware that families are important too.” Participant 29 said, “Recognize my contributions as a teacher.” These comments clearly support why those three specific leadership strategies positively impact teacher wellness. I was anticipating more comments from the participants in support of the social dimension within the open-ended responses as the social dimension was rated as the second most impactful dimension on the questionnaire, however there were only three comments in support of the social dimension found in the open-ended comments. Again, this finding is discussed more in Chapter 5.

Sliding Scale Question on Flourishing

The sliding scale question focused on Cherkowski and Walker’s (2020) model of flourishing schools. Participants were asked to indicate, using a sliding scale, the impact that the three components (subjective well-being, adaptive community, and leaderful mindsets) of flourishing schools have on their wellness. The sliding scale had a range from 1 = *do not agree* to 5 = *very much agree*. The question specifically stated: “Please indicate to what degree having a leader focus on these components would impact your professional wellness.” The results of this question are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Questionnaire Results: Level of Agreement Each Component Is Impactful

Aspect of flourishing schools	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Subjective well-being: positive emotions, positive relationships, and creating a sense of making a difference.	4.22	1.19
Adaptive community: an environment where staff are encouraged to communicate openly, be creative, and resolve team conflicts when they arise.	4.28	1.04
Leaderful mindsets: staff are able to identify ways that their work contributes to the larger, shared goals of the school, which provide greater ownership, engagement, and shared leadership.	4.12	1.16

Note. $N = 53$. Concepts in Column 1 are from *Workplace Well-Being in K-12 Schools: What*

Does It Mean to “Flourish” at Work? by S. Cherkowski & K. Walker, 2020, EdCan Network & University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education (<https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/Flourishing-Fact-sheet.pdf>).

All three components were rated by participants as being highly impactful, with all three mean scores being over 4. The area that was rated highest was adaptive community with a mean score of 4.28. This aspect of Cherkowski and Walker’s (2020) model refers to interpersonal skills and resolution of conflicts. Participants clearly value an environment where staff are encouraged to communicate openly with colleagues, be creative, and resolve team conflicts when they arise. These mean scores indicate that participants feel when leaders focus on the three main components of flourishing schools, they agree this focus highly impacts teacher’s professional wellness. Further implications of this finding are discussed in Chapter 5.

Focus Group Findings

Analysis of the focus group data began with holistic coding. Focus group answers from participants were much longer and more in-depth than the open-ended question responses on the questionnaire, and therefore holistic coding was appropriate. Using holistic coding, a researcher

attempts to grasp basic meaning from the data rather than analyze line by line, which lends itself better to a larger set of data. There were 21 holistic codes that emerged in Cycle 1, and again code mapping and code collapsing were used during the transition phase. Following second cycle pattern coding the data narrowed to 14 categories. The Cycle 1 codes, warrants, and Cycle 2 categories are displayed in Table 8. Frequency counts were not used in the analysis of the focus group data because of the small number of participants. The Cycle 1 codes (shown in Table 8) were commented on or supported by all four members of the group. Comments that were only made once or were not supported by all group members were considered outliers and were not carried forward to Cycle 2 pattern coding.

Table 8

Focus Group Data

Cycle 1 codes	Warrant	Cycle 2 Categories
Recognition, appreciation, being seen/Recognition & acknowledgement	When a person feels seen, they feel someone is recognizing and acknowledging them.	Recognition
Encourage opportunities to grow/PD growth	PD is all about growth.	PD
Small class sizes/Reduce workload/Take things off my plate	All three examples directly or indirectly reduce teacher workload.	Reduce workload
Provide time/Not overloading time	Both answers talked about time.	Time
Family-first mentality	Family-first mentality was mentioned.	Family first
Cover supervision/Cover class when needed	Both responses talk about having coverage of some kind.	Coverage
Support with difficult parents/Support when needed/Clear the path	These responses included feeling protected from central office initiatives, supported with difficult parents, or supported with things happening in one's personal life.	Supportive

Cycle 1 codes	Warrant	Cycle 2 Categories
Check-ins	This response involved checking in with teachers, even if brief.	Check-ins
Being in my class when I'm teaching	This response has to do with spending time in their classroom.	Time in classroom
Social gatherings	This response talks about having social events as a staff.	Social events
Listen/Being heard	Both responses have to do with a leader listening.	Listen
Upbeat and positive	If someone is upbeat, they are usually positive.	Positivity
Helped resolve conflict/ Manage people/Support through conflict	All responses alluded to a leader helping resolve conflict.	Conflict resolution
Visibility	Leader being visible	Visibility

Note. PD = professional development.

Throughout the focus group, many comments were shared about being supported, from “a leader who supports me with an issue with a colleague” to a leader who “supports my situation and carved out a half-time position for me, as that is what I needed at the time.”

Participant 3 shared a story in which a leader sat them down with a colleague to help resolve conflict: “There was an understanding between us afterwards. We were not best friends by any means but we both felt heard, and that made a huge difference and positively impacted my wellness.” Participant 2 talked about a leader who is in her classroom often and has conversations afterward, which she described as being “very supportive and encouraging for me as a teacher. I felt supported and that is huge for my wellness.” Also, being supported with difficult parents came up twice. Participant 4 said,

My administrator took on the difficult parents. He told me I no longer have to talk to them on the phone or through email, that all the communications would go through my principal. This was a huge load taken off me and I felt like he had my back 100%.

Participant 2 commented on how important confidence-building is, stating, “My principal encouraged me to grow and encouraged me to get my master’s. These kinds of things push me in a direction that I have really appreciated.” She went on to say that this recognition and encouragement makes her feel very confident, which positively impacted her professional wellness. Participant 4 talked about an administrator who “clears the path” for her staff and is not afraid to say no to new initiatives that the district pushes on them when he says his staff is too busy. Participant 4 said, “When your staff is at the end of their rope and he makes a choice like that to say no, we appreciate that so much and that impacts my wellness a lot, for sure!” Overall, the focus group mentioned a lot of the same information that culminated and supported the creation of the major themes of this research.

The final question asked to the group was whether there was anything that had not been mentioned that the group thought was highly impactful on teacher wellness and ability to flourish. Participant 1 mentioned social gatherings. This was further supported by Participant 2, who said, “I think that staff parties and gatherings really add to a positive dynamic and create better friendships among staff members.”

The categories that were collated from the open-ended portion of the questionnaire and focus group data during Cycle 2 were analyzed in aggregate, from which three themes emerged.

Consideration of Themes

Ongoing analysis and iterative returns to the data, including analysis of data from the Likert-type questions, the open-ended questions from the questionnaire and the transcript from the focus group resulted in the creation of three themes. Table 9 shows the themes, the categories used to support them, and the warrants used during the analysis.

The only category out of the 26 that did not fit within the three themes was physical space. In the context it was mentioned, participants identified that leaders ensured the physical space was safe and followed up if concerns existed. Therefore, while physical space was important and mentioned in some form by all participants, it stands alone from the themes. During this theming phase, the warrant for school improvement was looked at through more of a school cultural lens rather than as actual physical space. For that reason, physical space was left out as an outlier. Anecdotal data to support the three extracted themes were found throughout the open-ended questions and the focus groups.

Table 9

Emergent Themes Based on Established Categories

Themes	Categories	Warrant
Human traits	Positive & humor Approachable Flexible Communication	These categories describe a human characteristic: good communicator, approachable, with a good sense of humor.
Seen & valued	Food & drink Listen Time in the classroom Supported Connection & relationships Recognition & acknowledgement Check-ins Trust Family first Wellness Mental health Notes Coverage Time	These categories involve noticing and wanting to ease staff stress. When leaders provide treats in the staff room, support with a difficult parent, or notes of appreciation, teachers feel seen and valued. A focus on mental health and wellness shows teachers that the leader values them as a person and wants to ensure they are taken care of in all aspects of wellness. A leader who has an awareness of their actions is valued by teachers.
School improvement	PD Social events Build school community Manage conflict Coaching Resources	These categories involve striving to improve the school environment as a whole-school community by recognizing strengths and challenges and building a shared vision for improvement. Planning social events is part of building school community.

Note. PD = professional development.

Human Traits

Participants spoke of the importance of the human element and this is evidenced by the four categories that were established: positivity & humor, approachability, flexibility, and communication. Participants noted human traits that positively supported their professional wellness such as P18 who remarked, “having a sense of humor to enable us to feel light-hearted amidst the pressures of the job,” or P29 who stated “just jumping in to help without hesitation.” Other participants also elaborated on human traits or functions of those traits such as P5 who mentioned “good communication,” and P8 who noted “have an open-door policy for issues,” and P3 who said “change plans for PD etc. to accommodate emergent needs.” Comments that supported the four categories were mentioned a total of 21 times by questionnaire participants.

Participant 2 from the focus group said:

When I’m kind of emotionally not together, my kids often aren’t either, because they feed off of the emotion of the adult that they’re with. You see that in the classroom as well when I’m kind of grumpy. The behaviors, you know, escalate, or when I’m, like, really having a sunshiny day, then it just seems like the classroom does as well. And I think that’s true. With our administrators, you know, if they’re kind of coming in light-hearted and upbeat and positive, that translates on to the teachers, which then translates on to the kids. So I think I noticed that definitely, in my role as mom and as a teacher, but I think that’s true as a role of the administrator as well.

The other three focus group members in the group agreed that an upbeat, approachable personality positively impacts teacher wellness.

Seen and Valued

Comments to support the theme of being seen and valued were mentioned by Participant 16 who said, “trusting that we are professionals and are doing our jobs and not micromanaging us.” Participant 18 mentioned how they feel valued when a leader is supportive, they said, “support me when dealing with a difficult parent,” and Participant 15 talked about the impact of leaders who value family, they said, “having a family-first mentality” is important. Participant 19 mentioned the value of time by saying it is positively impactful to “keep staff meetings to 1 hour,” and P29 echoed this by saying “covering preps, supervision, and classes when there is a need” is positively impactful. Of these categories, the most supported categories were time, with 22 mentions; listen, with 20 mentions; appreciation and acknowledgement, with 16 mentions food and drink, with 14 mentions; and check-ins, with 12 mentions. When asked what leaders do to support teacher wellness, Participant 1 said, “Allowing our opinions to be heard and allowing space for feelings to be heard, and making sure we are OK, checking in, genuinely caring to see how our day is going, and listening.” Similarly, when answering the same question, Participant 6 said, “Creating an environment where all teachers have a voice and feel safe to have a professional conversation.” Participant 18 said that “often giving thanks, encouragement, commendation, and appreciation” was something their leader did to positively impact wellness. Participant 4 mentioned coverage, time, acknowledgement, and support in one response:

When it was a really busy week with interviews and, you know, you’re not getting the preps that you always get, my administrator just came out at lunch at my supervision and just said, “I’m going to take your supervision for you.” That was really, really powerful.

One of the most common comments regarding support was around support with difficult parents.

Participant 38 said, “Support me when I have a difficult parent,” which was echoed by

Participant 36 who said:

School leaders would back their teachers. If a parent was out of line, the administrator would often ask for clarification from the teachers and stand behind them, if it was reasonable, and take on all disgruntled communication so that a teacher was not left having to deal with it.

Participant 4 from the focus group summed up feeling supported in a really powerful way:

When you’re being emotionally supported, it makes you want to come to work, makes you feel less heavy, makes you feel like you’re doing a good job, makes you that much happier to come into a crazy busy classroom to deal with agitated parents, because you’re being supported, you know, what you’re doing matters. And you know, someone’s got your back. Like, just to have that makes a huge difference. You can have your cheerleaders at home, but they don’t know what you go through every day.

Administrators know what you go through. Other staff members know what you go through. So just to have that support helps the emotions, helps you get through the door. I think it’s a huge indicator of teacher wellness.

All examples and comments given in support of these 14 categories create a feeling of being seen and valued. Feelings of trust and support that were found within this category are part of the major components of flourishing schools (Cherkowski, 2017) and seemed to be perceived by teachers as areas that make them feel well.

School Improvement

Finally, comments to support the theme of school improvement were discussed by Participant 29 who said, “build time in our days to collaborate with other teachers,” and both Participants 45 and 46 who each stated “provide resources that are needed,” and “provide a wealth of resources,” respectively. “Orchestrate after-hours informal gatherings,” was mentioned by P44 and coaching was mentioned by P27 when they said, “have generative dialogue meetings with me to discuss my goals.” PD was mentioned 17 times and planning social events was mentioned 13 times. Participant 31 said, “When leaders encourage staff time where school is not talked about, it’s all about belly laughs and connecting,” which positively impacts their teacher wellness. Participant 44 said the same about leaders who encourage “orchestrated, after-hours informal gatherings.” Comments about conflict resolution were shared during the focus group. Participant 3 explained how a leader skilled in conflict resolution really impacted her wellness: “I felt heard and understood, the problem did not linger, it was resolved, and there was a mutual understanding.” Providing time for teacher collaboration was also mentioned more than once, in both the questionnaire and the focus group. Participant 12 said it is highly impactful when leaders “provide time to collaborate and work on professional goals and implement interventions.” The six categories established from the data all help to improve the school environment.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the findings from the questionnaire and focus group, including categories, themes, and corresponding warrants. Chapter 5 considers these findings through the lens of Dunn’s (1961) conceptual framework, literature surrounding professional flourishing, and literature related to teacher wellness.

Chapter 5: Discussion

At the start of this work, it was acknowledged that little empirical research is available that provides teacher perceptions and voice on the topic of teacher wellness. More specifically, those leadership strategies that teachers perceive to support their wellness and ability to flourish as a professional. This study has attempted to reveal those teacher perceptions and in the analysis of their voice, provide informed and valuable contributions to the success of teachers and improve their wellness. Secondly, this research provides school leaders with the most impactful strategies they can implement to highly impact teacher wellness which in turn will positively impact the students they serve. The framework of Dunn's (1961) wellness model and Cherkowski and Walker's (2020) model for flourishing schools provided both conceptual and theoretical support for the case study design seeking what Stake (2003) wrote of intrinsic case study that "first and last, the researcher wants a better understanding of this particular case" (p. 136). As a school leader in Alberta, the findings of this work will inform my decision-making.

Chapter 5 discusses study findings by first explaining the importance of this study at this time, then draws connections to Dunn's (1961) wellness model and Cherkowski and Walker's (2018) flourishing school model and, as appropriate, relating them to current research on wellness and school leadership. The discussion of themes is considered in the context of the research question that sought to determine teacher perceptions around leadership strategies and how they impact teacher professional well-being. The chapter further articulates the implications and recommendations intended to inform principals on supporting teacher wellness in their schools. Confounding findings are discussed, then the chapter concludes with limitations, suggestions for future research, and a summary.

Why This Study? Why Now?

Teacher wellness is declining in Alberta (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020, Froese-Germain, 2014; Gallup, 2014; Gray & Taie, 2015; Kyriacou, 2001; R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2015). The negative effects of declining wellness are evident in teacher attrition rates (Allen, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2010) and the number of teachers reporting an increase in stress and burnout (Gallup, 2014; Kyriacou, 2001, Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020). School leaders in Alberta are tasked with upholding the competencies of a legislated standard in which they must "demonstrate a commitment to the health and well-being of all teachers" (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 3). School leaders play an integral role in supporting teacher wellness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Whitaker, 2012) and for principals to be effective in meeting the legislated standard (Cite 2020 Ministerial Order), understanding what teachers perceive as highly impactful leadership strategies and how those strategies positively impact teacher wellness and their ability to flourish is critical. Data from this study informs that understanding.

A Blended Conceptual Framework

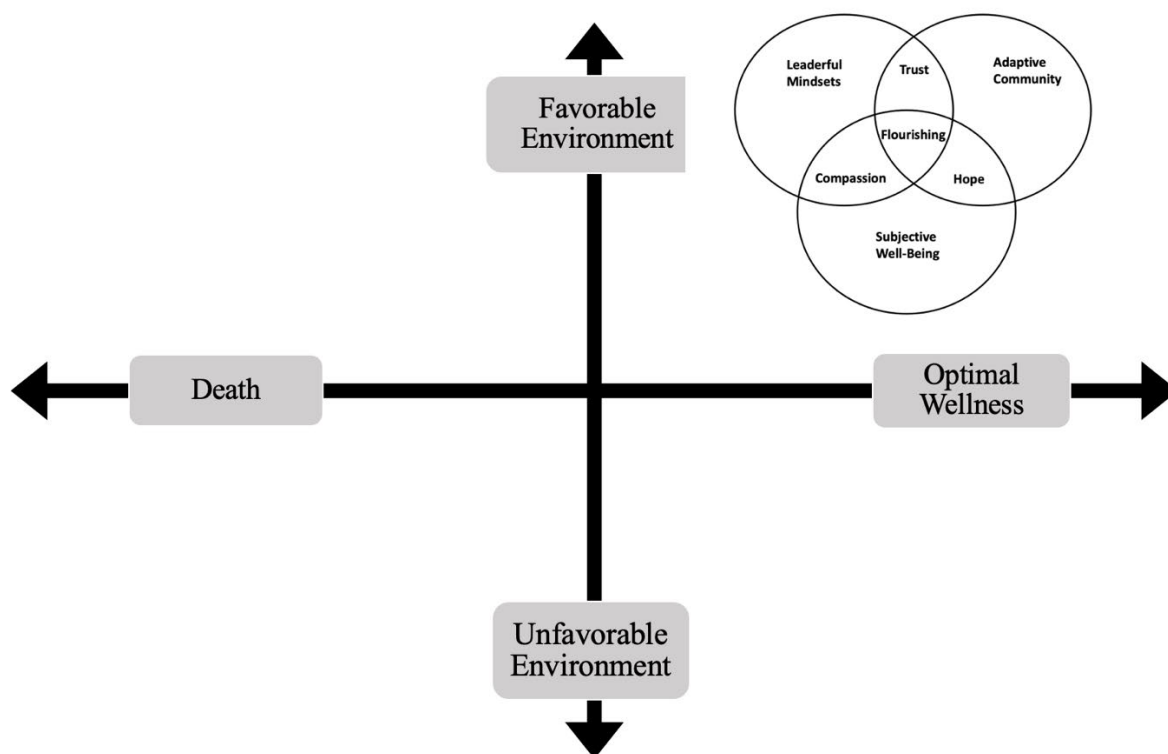
As Dunn (1961) suggested, wellness is a dynamic process that involves balancing six dimensions. Participants in this study were asked to rate how impactful it was for their leader to devote time to supporting them in each of the six dimensions (emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, physical, and environmental). Every dimension was perceived by participants to be at least somewhat impactful for a leader to focus on. These findings are consistent with Dunn's assertion of the importance of balancing all six dimensions and sends a clear message to school leaders that they must try to support all six dimensions to make a positive impact on teacher wellness. During transition stage code mapping, where I was looking for similarities to group

codes together, I also used more of a deductive lens to see how results of my study were relating back to Dunn's framework. Although a priori codes were not used during Cycle 1, I kept track of the six dimensions as I was looking for patterns and categories during Cycle 2. During this analysis I noted that there were many references from the participants that fell into the six dimensions of wellness. With the exception of spiritual, which no participants mentioned, the following frequencies were noted of participant comments that fit each dimension: emotional, 48; physical, 21; intellectual, 23; social, 21; environmental, 29. This data indicated that participants spoke about the importance of balancing all dimensions of wellness. Dunn's wellness model illustrates a favorable environment for attaining high-level wellness implying in his definition, more than just the absence of disease; it is a state of high functioning which was implied by participants in this work when they referenced to working in an environment that "provided clear and reasonable expectations;" "made it acceptable to ask for help or to acknowledge that we are human and may sometimes struggle;" "prioritizes what is most important and does not create extra work;" "is flexible;" and "provides time." Dunn's model is not specific to a working environment for educators, and alone does not fully capture nuances of participant comments specific to their context and situation. Therefore, Cherkowski and Walker's (2018) model for flourishing school environments, which addresses favorable environments for teacher wellness specifically was added to the conceptual framework. Participants spoke to all three components in their comments including Participant 1 from the questionnaire who said "check in, genuinely care about us, create real relationships" which supports subjective well-being. Participant 6 from the questionnaire who said "create an environment where all staff have a voice and feel safe to have professional conversations" which supports adaptive communities. Lastly, Participant 2 from the focus group who said "allow us

opportunities to grow and encourage us to contribute to work that aligns with school goals” which supports leaderful mindsets. It was evident by the data that leaders who are demonstrating all three components of flourishing schools help support teacher wellness. Figure 3 shows an image of the blended theories. Utilizing Cherkowski and Walker’s model as insight into quadrant 1 of Dunn’s wellness model, together as a lens for interpreting the data, was more comprehensive and defined a wellness environment better suited to educators.

Figure 3

Blended Framework



Discussion of Flourishing School Environments

Cherkowski and Walker's (2018) model identifies three main components of flourishing school environments that are needed to provide a supportive workplace for teachers. The majority of participants in this study indicated that having the leadership team focus on all three components of flourishing school environments would be highly impactful. This was further supported in participant responses to both open-ended questions, where participants reflected on and recommended leadership strategies that are highly impactful to their wellness. Participants shared comments that included elements of flourishing environments as P12 did commenting about "working in a supportive and collaborative environment," and P6 who emphasized the need for "an environment that has intentional team building," and "an environment that encourages staff to engage in different ways." Elements that create flourishing environments where teachers can attain high-level wellness are important for school leaders to know. If leaders are unsure of what conditions may create a flourishing environment, this model and the data that support it provide a good starting point. The three components of flourishing schools are subjective well-being, adaptive community, and leaderful mindsets (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018).

Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being includes positive emotions, positive relationships, and a sense of making a difference.

Cherkowski and Walker (2018) described three key positive emotions within their conceptual model: compassion, trust, and hope. Participants mentioned these emotions in their responses. Participant 19 said, "When creating initiatives, be compassionate to teachers' workload and how said initiatives may impact teachers and plan appropriately. Don't ask

teachers to meet during their planning time, PLC [professional learning community] time, or after school.” Participant 29 wrote about teacher autonomy: “Trusting that we are doing our jobs and not micromanaging us.” Participant 16 echoed this sense of trust as being highly impactful:

A leader who clearly communicates the school and division goals, gives us markers for success, then backed off with trust that as a professional I will do my part to achieve and reach the markers without being micromanaged. Instead, they offered support and diversified support to give me what I needed to keep the common goals for the year.

Relationships are enhanced when principals are seen as mutually invested stakeholders with their teachers. This study affirmed the importance of principals building positive relationships with staff. Participant 4 stated how important it is for a leader to “show an interest in my home life, know and remember facts about me.” Relationships are enhanced when principals are visible, respectful, and approachable. This was supported by Participant 3 in the focus group, who said,

Visibility is important in relationship building and in my 17 years as a teacher and now school leader I have found that administrators who are *out there* with the teachers and students build relationships. Making an effort to come out of the office, see what teachers and students see on a regular basis. It is important for them to be part of the whole school.

Principals can create a sense of making a difference by providing an environment where true collaboration is not only encouraged but developed. Providing a collaborative environment was mentioned by Participant 46, who suggested “planning and promoting collaboration among staff members including flexible time during professional development days to work with other staff to allow for team planning and planning to have staff observe each other.” These comments

from participants describe what a leader must do to create positive relationships and create a sense of making a difference that leads to overall subjective well-being.

Adaptive Community

Adaptive community includes an environment where staff are encouraged to communicate openly, be creative, and resolve team conflicts when they arise (Cherkowski & Walker, 2020).

A leader who allows teachers to feel comfortable communicating openly was said to be highly impactful by participants. Participant 2 from the focus group was very vocal about this:

The biggest impact is being a soundboard. When I'm frustrated with maybe a student or a situation that's rising, they don't even need to act or have an answer but just let me vent, and I know that they will keep my words confidential, and they are someone whom I trust. Just allow me the opportunity to express things that I can't to other people—this has been really valuable in my situation.

Teachers in this study consistently reported the importance of teacher voice and being heard. This included having input into decisions and initiatives and allowing space for feelings to be heard. The word “listen” was stated 20 times within the open-ended questionnaire responses and the focus group discussion. Participants clearly identified teacher voice as an area that school leaders should attend to with intentionality and purposeful actions and strategies.

Conflict resolution and teams who can communicate openly when resolving conflict are important descriptors of adaptive community, both mentioned by participants. Participant 1, from the focus group, spoke about the importance of conflict resolution and how valuable and important it is to her wellness to have an administrator who is skilled in this area:

I think about the number of conflicts adults have in a day, especially in a school, when you have 30 adults. And when it doesn't work well, it really falls apart quickly. So I've seen both ends of it. And when an administrator is not strong in this area, it really impacts your wellness, it takes up a ton of your time if things aren't going well, because there's no buffer there. You feel it's emotionally exhausting, because a lot of the time you're trying to figure out some of the problem-solving piece. And maybe you don't have the whole picture like an administrator does. They often know lots of those big picture details that you don't have and that makes solving problems more difficult. I feel like that's where administrators really shine—they can kind of see that bigger picture and give you help in that way. Or to say “this is something that yes, you need to dig into.” Or “this is important” or “let this go.” Or “you need to walk away from this.” They have that wisdom as well if they're good at dealing with people.

Participant 3 also mentioned how important this aspect was to her wellness. She shared a story about an educational leader who was “amazing” in this area: “He would actually call staff in if he heard there was an issue and just casually say, ‘Let's get to the bottom of this.’” He would “ensure staff felt heard and supported.” The participant went on to say this leadership strategy was encouraging and positively impacted her wellness because it made her feel supported.

Leaderful Mindsets

Leaderful mindsets include staff being able to identify ways that their work contributes to the larger shared goals of the school, which provides them with greater ownership, engagement, and shared leadership. Skill in conflict resolution spills over into this component of flourishing schools. When a leader builds capacity among staff and shares leadership skills and opportunities, they feel more competent and confident (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018). When the

goals of the school are communicated clearly and then the leader explicitly teaches or models the ways to meet these goals, staff will feel a sense of flourishing. Participant 4 shared a story about an administrator who was extremely skilled at conflict resolution and enabled staff to work things out. She stated, “He put protocols in place for practicing conflict resolution and required staff to learn these protocols so we all had skills in this area.” This common language created greater ownership, engagement, and shared leadership.

While both Dunn’s (1961) model of high-level wellness and Cherkowski and Walker’s (2020) model of flourishing schools are important on their own, together they provided a more comprehensive model to use for interpreting and understanding the data in this study. Cherkowski and Walker’s model adds the missing element of what a favorable environment looks like for teachers. Together they provided a more comprehensive model that defines a wellness rich environment suited to educators.

Discussion of Themes

Analysis of questionnaire data and focus group data detailed in Chapter 4 revealed three emergent themes that ran throughout the participant responses. The three emergent themes are; participants want to be seen and valued by leaders; certain human traits of leaders are described to be more impactful; and a focus on school improvement impacts wellness. The discussion that follows articulates how each theme relates to the research question about the impact of leadership approaches on teacher wellness and further connects to leadership approaches outlined in Chapter 2.

Seen and Valued

The theme of being seen and valued came out in many participant responses. Many of the specific strategies spoken about or suggested by participants relate to this theme. Strategies

including walking around with a coffee cart, bringing in food, checking in with staff, allowing for input on decisions affecting teachers, showing appreciation, and respecting the teacher's time all help to create a feeling that a teacher is being seen and valued by their leader. When you are seen and valued, I posit that you begin to flourish. Participant 28 said, "Just listen. A kind ear can go a long way." By simply listening in a kind and considerate way a leader can show that they value their teachers' voices. Participant 2 said, "Verbal appreciation expressed one-on-one and in public or staff meetings positively supports my wellness." Leaders can show they value their teachers in private or public ways by expressing their appreciation. Participant 5 captured what feeling seen and valued is all about by saying leaders should "create a positive environment that fosters positive relationships, builds trust, and creates an environment where teachers feel safe and that they belong." Similarly, Participant 13 stated that leaders who "encourage healthy work habits and work-life balance" create a work environment that feels very supportive and ensures staff can be at their best to serve students.

During the focus group, Participant 2 talked about feeling seen and appreciated by her administrator. She described how her administrator made her feel valued by encouraging her to get her master's degree and pushing her to step out of her comfort zone. She said,

My principal is always encouraging opportunities for growth, like encouraging me to get my master's, encouraging me to do some professional development sessions, or to lead professional development sessions with our staff. I wouldn't normally feel comfortable doing this but it's pushed me in a direction that I've really appreciated. It makes me feel like "Oh I've been recognized for some of my efforts and I'm being encouraged because he maybe sees a talent in me that I wouldn't see."

This idea of showing confidence in teachers by making them feel seen and valued is a specific strategy that impacted Participant 2's wellness in a positive way. This connects to the importance of relationships discussed earlier and to a distributed leadership approach.

Human Traits

Many times participants named specific human traits of leaders that they felt highly impacted their wellness. Thus, these human traits were put together to create the second theme. Leaders who are compassionate and empathetic and help create an atmosphere where teachers can thrive is important to wellness. This was clearly stated by Participant 1 from the focus group. She said the following with regards to a leader who highly impacted her wellness:

I would say the most impactful thing an administrator has done for me is actually to move me into a position where I could be successful. I was returning from a long- term leave in which I'd had multiple spinal surgeries. My administrator worked hard to find a kind of something where I could come back in to teaching but not go full-time into the classroom and basically created a position for me. They basically created it so they could meet my needs as to where I was at that time and also, I think, just believed in me and saw that I was capable of learning and growing and had passion in that area. And it was truly something that I've continued to be very grateful for.

The culture of care and inclusive and welcoming human traits that this leader demonstrated were highly impactful to this participant's wellness. Compassion and empathy were also mentioned under the recommendations that participants would give to leaders, including by Participant 18, who said, "Show compassion and empathy towards your staff." Other human traits that were mentioned were good listener, integrity, and honesty. Participant 2 said, "Be willing to listen, and be honest about what can and cannot be done." Participant 11 recommended that leaders

“model integrity and be supportive of teachers so that we can respect our leader even when he or she has to make a decision which may be difficult and not always what we want.” These traits are important to building trust, which is important to teachers to ensure they feel well. Being creative, democratic, and a team player were other common human traits mentioned. These traits were mentioned by Participants 12, 15, and 24. They recommended the following specific strategies that leaders should do to support teacher wellness: “Create a democracy, ask us our opinion,” “Listen to what teachers want and need,” and “Make sure that people are in roles that play to their strengths—we can all *cope* with a role that isn’t a good fit, but that should not be a long-term expectation.” These strategies instill team leadership and create confidence among teachers, which helps teachers to feel well and flourish at work.

School Improvement

The third theme that emerged was that of school improvement. Many of the strategies or conditions mentioned that teachers perceived to be impactful to their wellness relate to school improvement efforts. This idea of school improvement and building collective efficacy, connected to Bandura’s (1989) social cognitive theory mentioned earlier in this work, allows teachers to feel they are making a difference, one of the central tenets of flourishing schools. Thus, it was not surprising that a theme of school improvement emerged from the findings. Examples of leadership strategies that enhance school improvement were mentioned by Participant 17, who explained that their division created school-wide wellness committees and a “teachers matter” committee where representatives from each school work together to ensure teacher issues are dealt with. Participant 15 discussed transparent decision-making and said, “Ensure consistent and transparent messaging. Do not have certain staff in the know and others

in the dark.” These leadership strategies show a commitment to organization wellness as well as show a commitment to valuing the voices of others and transparent decision-making.

Understanding and working through conflict is a big part of improving a school and its environment. Conflict resolution was a specific leadership strategy that Participant 1 spoke about, which was outlined in detail in the adapted community component earlier in this chapter. Participant 4 also shared she has had school leaders who were both strong and weak in this area and how impactful it can be to feel supported in times of conflict and how “miserable” a situation can be when the leader is not skilled in conflict management. Participant 16 talked about how important it is for a leader to have presence and awareness to “prioritize what is most important and take other tasks off teachers’ plates.” This was echoed by Participant 29, who mentioned the ability of a leader to “read the room” and said it has been highly impactful to their wellness when a leader “acknowledges that something is not landing well with staff and stops pushing it through.” These participants agreed that these leadership strategies aid with school improvement.

Leaders who rely on others’ knowledge and ideas to help with school improvement are described as having a positive impact on teacher wellness. Participant 7 recommended that leaders get teachers’ input and work collaboratively to problem-solve or work towards improvement by “providing an opportunity to share what is going well, what is challenging, and work together to find solutions.” In the same way, Participant 12 said to “ask for and genuinely consider staff input on new ideas and processes.” In order to help improve the school, Participant 23 mentioned that leaders should “give staff opportunities to attend rich professional development opportunities and then identify ways that their knowledge can positively impact the school and work towards school goals.”

The specific impactful leadership strategies that teachers recommended and listed both on the questionnaire and in the focus group, created the three themes. Therefore, it is not surprising that within these themes, elements of the three leadership styles that help promote teacher wellness can be found. Specific strategies and conditions named by the teachers can be found within the definitions and descriptions of the three leadership styles discussed in Chapter 2. This finding supports that certain types of leadership styles do seem to promote teacher wellness better than others.

Themes Connecting to Leadership Styles

Crippen's (2012) construct of authentic leadership addresses concepts such as inclusivity and respect, collaborative and transparent decision-making, a focus on individual and organizational wellness, and a culture of care. Participants in this work made it clear they value being listened to, being respected for their work, and feeling part of a collaborative team. They felt these leadership strategies and conditions created a feeling among teachers that they are being seen and valued. I believe this sense of respect extends to the theme of school improvement by creating a more welcoming atmosphere from which collaboration can thrive.

Bowman (2005), Greenleaf (1977), and Lyman (2012) stated that servant leadership comes from the drive to serve others. Olesia et al. (2014) examined how leaders work towards school improvement by showing a commitment to creating an environment that is supportive for their staff so that they can best support and serve their students. Greenleaf (1977) stated that a key ingredient to successful servant leadership is to listen with respect and appreciation for others. Thus, creating a feeling among teachers that they are being seen and valued. Trying to understand conflict by listening to all parties involved is one of the most important elements of service by a leader. As backed up by the participants, when they feel heard through conflict

resolution, this highly impacts their wellness. Many of the human traits mentioned by participants are also used to describe servant leaders, for example, trustworthiness, encouraging, empathy, compassion, and a leader who shows integrity, and understanding. Participants in this study opined that leaders who portray these types of human traits were perceived to positively impact teacher wellness.

Distributed leadership is a shift from looking at one heroic leader standing atop a hierarchy, molding their school community to fit their own purpose or desires, to a more achievable, sustainable way of looking at leadership (Camburn et al. 2003). Often called shared leadership, team leadership, or democratic leadership, this type of leadership embodies what it means to be seen and valued (Spillane, 2005). Showing confidence in teachers by allowing them to demonstrate their strengths, be creative with their ideas, and be heard when making decisions is the most valuable gift a school leader can give (Whitaker, 2012). Participants in this study described how they feel they are able to flourish when they are asked for input and work within environments that allow for meaningful collaboration. This confidence in teachers also creates an environment of teachers with high efficacy. Teachers with high efficacy is named as Hattie's number one indicator of improved student outcomes which directly relates to an improved school (Donohoo, 2017).

It is very clear that findings from this study indicate that the specific strategies and dimensions of wellness that teachers name to be highly impactful to their wellness do align with the leadership styles that are said to promote teacher wellness.

Implications

In this study, participant perceptions were shared on how leaders can create conditions where teachers feel seen and valued, the human traits of leaders that they feel support their

wellness, and the actions that leaders can take to support school improvement, that lead to a flourishing work environment (Cherkowski & Walker, 2020; Kutsyuruba, 2019a.) More specifically, this study begins to fill the gap regarding specific school leader strategies teachers believe support their wellness.

This study focused on elementary school teachers in rural Alberta school divisions as teachers in rural areas often experience different, additional stressors, and to investigate when teachers felt their wellness was positively impacted by school leaders, and why. The specific strategies and conditions revealed in this work have implications for school leaders, including both principals and vice-principals, who both have a vested interest in supporting teacher wellness.

First, school leaders must seek to build relationships and input from their staff so they may understand the needs of staff and what they perceive highly impacts their wellness. As indicated by the participants here, all six of Dunn's (1961) dimensions are impactful and so school leaders must balance their strategies rather than focus on one dimension. While some dimensions may appear easier to address given time and resources, the interdependence of all six as illustrated in the findings here, make this a poor leadership approach. Second, ensure staff feel supported in a variety of contexts. The findings demonstrate that when leaders create the conditions and display human traits like compassion, trust, and encouragement teachers perceive these conditions to highly impact their wellness. Teachers who are left feeling unsupported by their leaders will not be well. Third, better understand how to foster effective relationships within the context of the *LQS*, specifically understanding more about the strategies that teachers say demonstrate to them, a commitment to their health and wellness.

Know Your Staff and Their Needs

There was one main finding that emerged about knowing staff and their needs: one size does not fit all. Although all dimensions of wellness were rated by most participants as having somewhat of a positive impact on their wellness, three dimensions were indicated by some participants as having no impact at all when a leader focuses on them. These dimensions were spiritual ($n = 8$), physical ($n = 4$), and emotional ($n = 1$). The reason the spiritual and physical dimensions were rated by the highest number of participants as not impactful was not answered in this study. The emotional dimension was rated by the most participants as being highly impactful ($n = 39$) and yet one participant indicated that it is was not impactful at all. This supports the recommendation that leaders need to know their staff and what kind of support different staff members perceive to be impactful to their wellness. What works for the majority would be good, but leaders who focus only on the majority run the risk of leaving a small number of staff members feeling unsupported. This idea is supported by Chapman and White's (2019) book *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, which discusses how staff have different preferences about how to be supported. This finding was also supported by the second Likert question on the questionnaire, which asked participants to rate the impact level of specific leadership strategies. Two of the highest rated strategies were also two of the only strategies that some participants indicated as having no impact at all. Again, this supports the idea that one size does not fit all, as not all teachers perceive the same strategies to have the same level of impact on their wellness and ability to flourish.

Focus on All Dimensions of Wellness

Participants' perceptions on what leadership actions, conditions, and strategies are highly impactful varied, as did their perceptions of each dimension of wellness. Although some

dimensions were rated as more impactful than others, each dimension had at least three participants indicate that it was highly impactful to their wellness. This finding demonstrates to leaders that all dimensions of wellness are important to teacher wellness in some way and that a thorough and balanced approach to wellness is what is needed to help teachers flourish. Furthermore, the findings show that more than 85% of all participants, indicated that a leader who focuses on each specific dimension is at least somewhat impactful. Leaders can feel confident that if they are making an effort to support their teachers in all six dimensions of wellness, they will likely have a positive impact. Within the questionnaire, teachers were asked to rate how impactful an existing list of strategies was to their wellness. All six elements of wellness were represented within these specific examples. The list of specific strategies that participants ranked from most impactful to least impactful can be found in Appendix D. It is worth highlighting that the emotional dimension ranked number one overall. This was summed up beautifully by Participant 4, who said,

If you are being emotionally supported, this makes you want to come to work, it makes you feel less heavy, it makes you feel like you are doing a good job, and makes you feel so much happier. When you walk into a busy classroom or deal with agitated parents, and you feel you are being supported, you know what you are doing matters. You know someone has your back, just that makes a huge difference. You can have cheerleaders at home, but they don't know what you go through every day, administrators know what you go through. So just having that support, helps the emotions and helps you walk through the door every day. I think that is a huge indicator of wellness.

Ensure Staff Feel Supported

Perhaps this is a very simple implication, but one that was articulated by three out of four participants within the focus group. Although findings did show that emotional support is important, passionate comments, including the aforementioned, were shared about support in general. Participant 1 said,

Our job is so emotionally heavy, what we do every day requires constant emotional giving. We put everything that matters to us aside while we are at work to deal with student issues, problems, and needs. Then you add parents, colleagues, and administrative needs on top of that and you know, we have a lot of demands. So, to have an administrator who recognizes when not to ask for one more thing or to be appreciative even in just little ways of the things you are doing, I think that is teacher heaven really. When you have a place you're happy to go to everyday and you feel supported.

Participant 3 echoed this by saying,

Yes, we are constantly dealing with everyone else's emotions and trying to set them up, walk them through, and if you have no one walking alongside you, it can be completely draining by the time you get home. Just by appreciating and seeing, and I guess acknowledging the effort that is going into all of it is huge. I guess we know the importance of this because as teachers we do this for kids and it is nice to have it back.

The simple act of leaders ensuring that their teachers feel supported, however that may look, is ultimately what stands out from the findings that teachers perceive to be highly impactful.

A Better Understanding of Competency One in the Leadership Quality Standard

School leaders and teachers in Alberta have a unique labor relationship, as both groups belong to the Alberta Teachers' Association, which positions leaders and teachers as collaborators bound by the same professional ethics. This relationship allows the pursuit of wellness to proceed transparently as traditional management versus employee attitudes are not the prevailing reality in Alberta. The assumption of good will by the other and the common professional goal of meeting student needs provides the ideal backdrop for pursuing wellness. Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) has made an ongoing commitment to maintaining the province's outstanding reputation in education. Its 2003 report included many recommendations and deliberate actions to adhere to for the future. Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) also recognized excellence in the province's teachers, as well as school leaders, and is working to ensure that this continues. Ensuring leaders have the skills and knowledge to keep teachers well would align with this commitment to creating excellent teachers and school leaders.

Additionally, Alberta's education system has an excellent reputation internationally (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2008). First, the Province of Alberta has done well on multiple measures according to the Programme for International Student Assessment, which is completed every 3 years. Alberta's average score in science and reading has exceeded that of other parts of the country consistently, since 2000 (Schleicher, 2019). Second, Alberta education also boasts innovation with projects like the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, which has been recognized as one of the best examples of sustained, school-based improvements anywhere in the world (Hargreaves et al., 2009). Third, Alberta was the first province in Canada to introduce standards for teachers, including the TQS in 1997 and the LQS in 2019. The

competencies and standards in these documents ensure a consistent set of skills for teachers and leaders at all levels of the education system (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2018).

The LQS states under the Fostering Effective Relationships competency that “a leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community” (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 3). One of the indicators for this competency is “demonstrating a commitment to the health and well-being of all teachers, staff and students” (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 3). Findings from this study can help guide and educate leaders as to what specific strategies teachers perceive can be used by leaders to demonstrate that commitment to the health and well-being of staff. This commitment to ensure the wellness of teachers will keep Alberta’s educational reputation strong and maintain a high standard of excellence in teaching.

Recommendations

The implications of this study led to three main recommendations for educational leaders. The following recommendations are not specific as to leave room for each educational leader to decide for themselves how to make each recommendation work for their specific school, staff or context. As stated above, one size does not fit all, thus, these recommendations provide leaders with the ability to work within their own school contexts. The three overall recommendations relate to time, support dealing with complex student needs, and advocacy to school boards and or district office.

Find or Make Time

Throughout this study, several comments were made regarding time. Most of these comments were specifically targeted toward time on professional development (PD) days. PD days are typically set by school boards with the intention that teachers are using this time

specifically to grow and develop new ideas and ways to improve their teaching practice as outlined by division initiatives. Although some participants were saying they would rather use PD time to get work done, get caught up on marking, or to prepare classroom materials, this is not the intended use of these days. Therefore, it would be recommended that school leaders find or make time within a timetable to provide teachers with the time they are seeking. This may involve utilizing a portion of a PD day or another option such as embedding time into the school timetable. This recommendation was supported by Participant 20 who stated “don’t make teachers meet during their own time” as well as by Participant 18 who suggested that leaders “have flexible portions of work time during PD days.” A leader providing time to teachers by covering classes or supervision shifts was stated by both Participants 21 and 30. Embedding time by bringing in subs, covering classes, or creative scheduling can be done by leaders to positively impact teacher wellness.

Increase Mental Health Support for Student

Many participants spoke of the need to feel supported. Specifically adding more support to schools to deal with the increased complexity of students and student needs. Participant 4 from the focus group stated “my leader actually reallocated funds to keep our grade one class sizes smaller because we had so many diverse needs in my school” she further stated “this creation of smaller classes was huge for my own wellness, I was overwhelmed with the amount of needs.” If leaders are able to bring in more mental health workers or create programs within the school that provide the students with nutrition, and assist with their social and emotional needs, before they enter the classroom, teachers would not have to deal with the behaviors that often come from students’ unmet needs. Teachers are not equipped with the right tools to help address certain mental health issues nor do they have the time or resources to feed a child or sit one on one with

them for several minutes so they can work through a personal problem. If leaders could support teachers by bringing in more mental health workers or by providing programs to meet the needs of kids, this would have a high impact on the wellness of teachers.

Advocate to District Office

It was very clear from the voices of participants within this study that having a voice and being heard was a highly impactful strategy. If leaders can take what they are hearing from their teachers and advocate this to their district office staff and/or school boards, this would go a long way toward highly impacting teacher wellness. One example could see principals advocating for fewer professional development days and replacing some of those with “teacher workdays.” This would enable teachers to have the classroom preparation time that they so desperately need, and still honour the intent of predetermined professional development days. Participants in this study spoke about taking work off their plates, specifically, Participant 19 noted that leaders should “be mindful of new district initiatives and anticipate how the workload will impact teachers and speak up against initiatives that may create work.” Participant 29 echoed that idea by saying, “Read the room, know when something isn’t going to land well and push back on new initiatives that cause greater workload for teachers.” Currently in Alberta, there is a new curriculum being implemented. If leaders could advocate for money to be spent on supporting sub-release time for teachers to work on new curriculum or for teams to be created to work on premade lessons that relate to new curriculum, then less work is having to be done by teachers on their own time. Any leader who advocates for their teachers and speaks on behalf of teachers for anything that will support their teachers, will again positively impact teacher wellness. Participants also spoke about the importance of collaboration. In some rural school divisions, there is only one teacher at each grade level and in some cases, one teacher for a split grade (ex. one teacher teaching a grade

one/two classroom). In these cases, collaboration with another grade colleague is impossible unless you work with a nearby school. Both Participant 27 and 29 said “build time in our day or provide us with days to collaborate with other staff.” If leaders are able to advocate for district-wide collaboration days, or days that small school staff members can be brought together to share ideas and collaborate, teacher wellness would improve substantially. School leaders need to be open and willing to bring good ideas, brought to them by teachers, to their school boards and/or districts as they are in the best position to be the advocator.

These recommendations, along with the specific strategies identified by participants in the questionnaire and recommended by participants during the focus group, (see Appendix D and E) were found to be highly impactful on teacher wellness.

Confounding Findings

During the analysis phase of this study, two confounding findings were noted through reading and reviewing of journal entries and analytical memos. One came as a surprise to me the other was not a surprise but a finding that was mentioned numerous times and is one that teachers perceive to be very important; thus, I feel leaders need to find a way to address it in order to support teacher wellness.

The Social Dimension

Based on questionnaire responses the social dimension of wellness was rated second highest in terms of impact on teacher wellness based on questionnaire responses. It is clearly an important element of the conceptual framework for the study, and is spoken to in the literature as well (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Greenleaf, 1977; Reimers, 2022; Russell & Stone, 2002). Reimers (2022) spoke to the negative impact that the lack of ability for teachers to collaborate, celebrate, or meet had on teachers during the COVID pandemic. Interestingly, when asked to

recommend one strategy they would share with school leaders, teachers did not highlight strategies from this dimension. I was expecting more recommendations around this dimension, but that was not the case. This may be because teachers felt that planning a gathering or bringing in lunch on a PD day is low-hanging fruit. That is, these social ideas, suggestions, or requests may seem simple and easy for their leaders to do and are also not hard to have conversations about face-to-face. These kinds of strategies are not personal and asking for them would not come across as a personal attack on a leader, whereas if a teacher was trying to convey to a leader that they need to provide better PD, or they need to communicate with staff better, these can become difficult conversations to have face-to-face. So when provided with the anonymity of a questionnaire, teachers may have felt more protected to give those recommendations that may be harder for leaders to hear face-to-face and may take personally.

Time on Professional Development Days

Professional development days are a regular part of every school year in Alberta. The three school divisions represented in this study have anywhere from 14 to 20 PD days annually. In Alberta, every teacher and school administrator employed by a school system must develop and implement an annual plan for professional growth that outlines the PD activities the teacher intends to undertake that year (Alberta Teachers Association, 2023). One of the greatest challenges relates to the time provided to teachers on these dedicated PD days. This response was very clear based on participant responses. Ten specific in vivo codes mentioned “time on PD days” as a strategy that would highly, and positively impact teacher wellness. This need for time was clearly articulated by Participant 21 who said,

Do not add extra work to an already overloaded staff member. Do not have more meetings to discuss my wellness, or my PD needs, or my professional growth plan. I just want a free hour to put up a bulletin board or plan some lessons or use the photocopier!

Many other participants echoed this similar plea. Participant 4 said, “Give enough teacher time on PD days,” Participant 9 said, “Make PD time available to work with coworkers,” and similarly Participant 10 said, “Give time on PD days to plan with coworkers, work on Individualized Program Plans (IPPs), professional growth plans, and report cards,” Participant 13 said, “Give us lots of time in the classroom during PD days,” and finally Participant 29 said, “We do a lot of PD, work days where we could just sit and meet with our coworkers would help me emotionally a great deal.” It is clear from the data gathered in this study that one major specific action that teachers are saying would help their wellness is give them time to do what they need to do on PD days. This particular finding did not surprise me. As a leader I have had many lived experiences with this struggle of trying to create meaningful PD activities for teachers in my role as an instructional leader at the same time knowing that teachers are really just thinking, “Please let us just do what we need to do.” The challenge for school leaders is to find a balance between providing this time that teachers so desperately want while also ensuring that teachers are engaging in PD that results in undergoing personal change, questioning current practice, changing practice, changing beliefs, or furthering learning (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2023). Thus, this second confounding finding is that somehow leaders need to ensure teachers are being seen and valued by listening to their plea but at the same time ensure they are doing their own due diligence as a school leader in ensuring that proper kinds of PD opportunities are happening within their schools. A leader who can find that balance and create a PD structure

where teachers feel like they have been heard and have been provided with more time to meet their own needs would be one strategy that highly impacts teacher wellness.

Limitations

Limitations of this case study include the specific context of participants that bounded the study, the small number of questionnaire respondents and focus group participants, limitations of the questionnaire itself in terms of subjective interpretations of key terminology and the lingering impact that the COVID pandemic may have had that resulted in skewed responses from teachers.

This study was limited to elementary school teachers within three rural Alberta school districts, which limits the generalizability of results. The time restrictions of the program limited the size and scope of the study to what was manageable within the available time for data collection and depth of analysis. A longer investigation period would have allowed for the examination of a more geographically diverse sample with a broader range of grades taught and potential disaggregation by school type.

Given the number of participants and the nature of examining the lived experiences and perceptions of participants within a specific context, the transferability of the findings of this study are also limited (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically speaking to context, the Alberta government mandated new testing requirements for elementary schools in the same month I sent out my questionnaire. This change to teacher's work environments may have increased stress levels for participants now required to learn and administer new numeracy and literacy tests to their students. This new testing mandate created new time pressures which may have impacted the time and energy available to address the questionnaire and affected response rates.

The nature of the response options for Likert-type questions limited participant ability to show degree of impact. The choices provided were *not at all impactful*, *somewhat impactful*,

moderately impactful, and *highly impactful* and participants were allowed to choose only one of those four. The ordinal nature of these items, along with the subjective understanding of the terminology of the responses by each participant, prevented respondents from being able to indicate strength of agreement; providing a slider scale option with more intervals would have allowed for a greater refinement of response and subsequent analysis. The response options limited how specific and descriptive participants were able to be.

Focus group participation was also a limiting factor in terms of depth of analysis. Eight people agreed to participate in the follow-up focus group. All eight were invited via email, and seven responded that they would join the Google Meet. However, only four logged on that evening. Focus groups are an effective method of triangulating participant responses from other data sources (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989). A defining feature of focus groups is the interaction between and among participants to ascertain clarity and commonality of understanding. Had all eight volunteers actually participated, the conversation may have been richer and revealed more nuanced understandings.

Last, a limitation for any research conducted in the months following the COVID 19 pandemic are the additional and unique stressors it placed on teacher wellness (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2021; Polok et al., 2020; Sokal et al., 2020a). Respondents in this study are all recovering from the effects of working under the restrictions and requirements forced upon schools, school leaders, teachers and students during the pandemic. Participating teachers' state of wellness due to their lived experiences over the last 2 years likely influenced their responses to the questionnaire prompts and focus group questions further limiting the generalizability of the results to that particular context.

Future Research

The findings from this work raised several questions about factors impacting teacher wellness, especially specific to leadership strategies. While outside of the scope of this work I identified two opportunities for future research that emerged and which I believe build on the findings. Repeating the study with different geographic populations and school designations and creating a valid and reliable tool that can be used across many populations to measure wellness and the factors that impact wellness in educational settings.

Repeat the Study With a Different Population

Expanding the scope of the study to include additional populations and locations, such as middle or high school teachers and urban or suburban settings, would allow for comparison of results to see if teachers at varying school levels, regardless of rural or urban location, have similar perceptions regarding their professional wellness. Options include repeating the study with elementary teachers from urban areas and comparing the perspectives of urban and rural elementary school teachers, repeating the study with middle or high school teachers from rural areas and comparing the perspectives of the two levels of teachers, and repeating the study and having a focus group of men and a focus group of women to compare perceptions of teacher wellness based on gender.

Another important population to potentially repeat this study with is school leader participants. During analysis, it dawned on me numerous times that this part of the leadership role—ensuring teachers are well—has complexities and importance. I wondered, as leaders are working to ensure that their teachers are well, who is taking care of them? There is so much pressure for school leaders to be everything for everyone, but just as when teachers are not OK, kids will not be OK if the leaders of the teachers are not OK, and then what? Perhaps repeating

this study to ask leaders what are their perceptions of strategies that their leaders, such as superintendents or other central office staff, can use to ensure they are well would be important. Alternatively, a study could ask leaders to rate the importance of specific leadership strategies that they feel teachers perceive to be highly impactful and compare congruence of awareness and if they are aligned. This may lead to leaders having to change their ways if what they were doing turns out to not have been highly impactful. This again helps leaders to focus on the highly impactful and do away with those strategies that are not.

Create a Valid Instrument

I was unable to find a validated tool for use in this study to investigate teacher perceptions of how leaders impact their professional wellness. Creating a valid and reliable tool that can be used across many populations to measure wellness and the factors that impact wellness would increase trustworthiness of the data and allow for a greater degree of comparison between different contexts and populations. Such an instrument would need to be sufficiently responsive to the many and varied school settings and the cultures and identities of those who live and work within them. Given this complexity, such an undertaking may be beneficial for the research community investigating issues of workplace wellness beyond education.

Summary

Seeking to understand the leadership strategies that are truly impactful on teacher wellness and professional flourishing is, in my view, critical to improving student achievement and ensuring that good teachers remain in the profession and continue to meet the needs of students while feeling a sense of personal and professional fulfillment. Theme 1 which emerged from the findings provides evidence of this view. Teachers in this study have indicated that when

they are seen and valued, when they feel as though they have been heard and feel like they have a voice, this highly impacts their wellness.

When it comes to leadership strategies and caring for teacher wellness, listening was cited as one of the most impactful. However, listening in and of itself, while beneficial, may not be enough to preserve wellness over time. Participant 14 stated passionately:

We keep saying that we need more support in the classroom, smaller class sizes and more support for behaviors, but nothing changes. So yes, this hugely affects our wellness. I am tired of filling out survey after survey and nothing gets done about our issues.

In this comment, a caution arises for school leaders around any strategy you invoke to support teacher wellness. Regardless of your desire to listen and consider teachers' ideas or your intent to meet their needs in other ways, what is critical is that they perceive these actions to be supportive. If teachers perceive that through your actions or perhaps inactions that your intentions lack substance, then a negative impact on wellness occurs.

If a leader takes the time to listen to staff, gets to know what their needs are with regards to supporting their professional wellness, and then is perceived to not follow through, no improvement will be made to teacher wellness. The damage done to morale and to the relationships between staff and school leadership would eliminate any gains suggested in the main findings from this study.

There is a popular saying in leadership that goes: "We asked, you said, we did" (Bellò & Downe, 2022). Essentially this means that school leaders will ask for teachers' voices and input, hear what they say, and then actually follow through with what was said with specific strategies. This study asked the question, the teachers responded, and now it is up to leaders to implement the specific strategies that were said to be impactful to teacher wellness. With this saying in

mind, an open-ended survey question asked teachers what one recommendation they would share with school leaders about how to best support teacher wellness. Much of this chapter spoke about many of these strategies and how they impact teacher wellness. Highlighted findings from this study including listening to teachers, valuing their work and efforts by reducing workload, ensuring PD days are meaningful to teachers, creating strong working relationships by checking in and treating staff with food and recognition along with others noted in the appendices provide a roadmap of ideas for school leaders to follow, if it fits the context and setting of their school. A full, simplified list of what teachers recommend can be found in Appendix E.

Asking for teacher perceptions, as was the intent of this study, is only the first step. School district leaders, school leaders, and all decision-makers involved initially as listeners to the teacher voice must have the intention and commitment to act upon what they hear. All successful change models require this foundational work, and those same models also mandate action based upon what is learned. Are voices truly heard if they are not acted upon, or worse, ignored? Granted, there are many factors that influence decision-making regarding school resources, human and otherwise; however, as Hattie (2016, as cited in Donohoo, 2017) made clear, teachers have the biggest impact on student achievement during the school day, and their voices need to matter.

Overall, principals can impact or enhance teacher wellness in the school by knowing the needs of their staff and demonstrating respect for colleagues by expressing appreciation, by increasing opportunities for teachers to have a voice, leaving them feeling seen and valued, by creating a flourishing work environment that balances all six dimensions of wellness, and by doing so using the human traits that teachers perceive to be caring and compassionate.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire Consent Statement and Questions

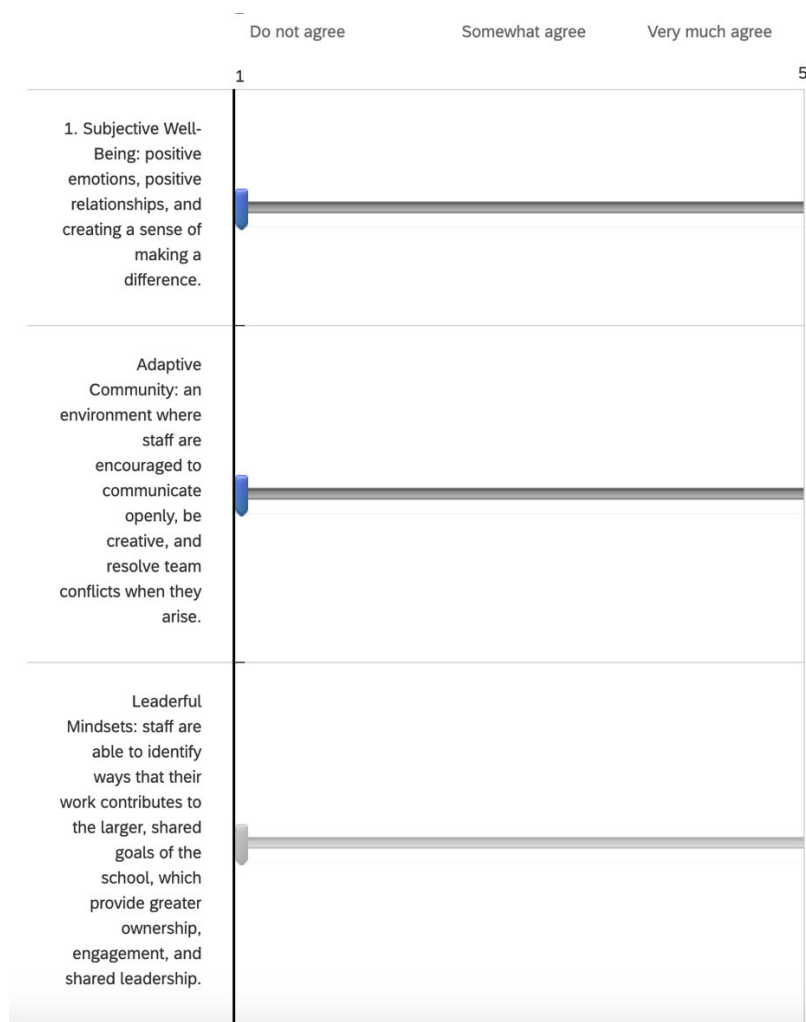
This questionnaire is part of a research study conducted by Kate M. Syson, as part of the UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND School of Education doctoral program. **I hope to learn about the perceptions of elementary teachers on how leaders impact their professional wellness.**

If you agree to participate, please complete the questionnaire using the Qualtrics link below. If you do not want to participate, please do not complete this questionnaire. This is a confidential questionnaire and any data collected will be considered in aggregate with **no identifying information**. Therefore, there are no anticipated risks to your participation in this research by completing the questionnaire. All data will be kept in a password protected computer. Participating in this research will help us better understand the perceived effectiveness of the factors (conditions, actions, and strategies) that leaders use to support your professional wellness. However, we cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research. **Your participation is voluntary**, and your decision whether to not to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of Portland or the school division in which you work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Information provided by participants will be aggregated and analyzed qualitatively and will include basic descriptive and inferential statistics.

The findings from this questionnaire may be used in a future conference or professional development presentation with regard to teacher wellness. The information you provide will be confidential as minimal demographics (gender and years of experience) are being collected for analysis. This data collected during this research is for research purposes only.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at ksyson@up.edu or (403) 742-2235, or my faculty advisor Dr. Randy Hetherington at

3. The following are components of flourishing schools; Subjective Well-Being, Adaptive Community, & Leaderful Mindsets. Please indicate to what degree having a leader focus on these components would impact your professional wellness.



4. What one recommendation would you share with school leaders about how to best support teacher wellness?

5. For the following 8 questions, please indicate to what degree you think each specific strategy is positively impactful to your professional wellness.

A leader who provides me with opportunities to collaborate with my colleagues.

Not at all Impactful

Somewhat Impactful

Moderately Impactful

Highly Impactful

Demographics:

Please choose which gender you identify with?

- a) male
- b) female
- c) non-binary/ third gender
- d) prefer not to say

How many years have you been teaching/

- a) 1-5
- b) 6-10
- c) 11-15
- d) 16 or more

Appendix B: Consent Statement for Focus Group

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kate Syson as part of the UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND School of Education doctoral program. I hope to learn about the perceptions of elementary teachers on how leadership strategies may impact their wellness and professional flourishing. You were selected as a possible participant in the focus group portion of this study because you indicated your willingness to volunteer on the questionnaire and were randomly selected as a participant.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether to participate in the focus group. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have for clarification before you agree to continue your participation.

This focus group will consist of 4-8 teachers selected at random from those who completed the questionnaire and willingly left their contact information to participate in the focus group. The group will discuss in greater depth and detail why and how leaders impact teacher wellness. This focus group will take approximately 45-60 min. and will be conducted using the Zoom media platform. This Zoom meeting will be recorded, but participant's names will not be used during the discussion nor will they appear anywhere in the transcript for analysis. Participants may choose to keep their camera off during the focus group.

If you are uncomfortable sharing on a certain question, topic or experience you can just choose to pass. Other leaders across Alberta may benefit from knowing what it is that teachers say and perceive to impact their wellness. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research. As a small token of my appreciation of your time, you will all receive a \$10 coffee card.

Any identifying data that is obtained during this study that could identify a specific participant will be removed prior to analysis. Focus group participants will be identified during the discussion by participant numbers instead of names.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of Portland or the school division that you work for. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at ksyson@up.edu or (403) 742-2235, or my faculty advisor Dr. Randy Hetherington at hetherin@up.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB@up.edu). You will be offered a copy of your signed consent form to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

I, _____, understand the implications of this research project and agree / do not agree (circle one) to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions and Protocols

1. What strategies, actions or conditions have school leaders made, throughout your career, that you feel positively impacted your wellness as a teacher and your ability to flourish as a professional.
2. Think of a specific example of something a school leader did that you felt was the most impactful, in a positive way, to your wellness as a teacher and your ability to flourish as a professional. Why do you feel this example was particularly impactful?
 - a. How did it make you feel?

Section on Flourishing (next 3 questions)

3. Subjective well-being is defined as: positive emotions, positive relationships, and a sense of making a difference. are all components that contribute to a staff member's sense of flourishing. Think of school leader who promoted subjective well-being and share how, if at all, that impacted your teacher wellness and your ability to flourish as a professional?
4. Creating an adaptive community is defined as: an environment where staff are encouraged to communicate openly with colleagues, be creative, and resolve team conflicts when they arise. Think of school leader who promoted adaptive community and share how, if at all, they improve teacher wellness and your ability to flourish as a professional?
5. When it comes to your leader creating leaderful mindsets, meaning you are able to describe and identify ways that your work contributes to the larger, shared goals of the school community, which provides a greater sense of ownership, engagement, and shared leadership. How does your leader do this and Does this type of mindset impact your wellness?

6. At first glance of my questionnaire data, the most impactful strategies seem to be falling under the emotional category, would you agree that a leader who is emotionally supportive impacts overall professional wellness the most? Why?
7. Is there anything that has not been mentioned that you feel is highly impactful to teacher wellness and their ability to flourish as professionals?

Instructions:

Welcome to today's focus group on teacher perceptions of leadership strategies that positively impact professional wellness. Let me begin by thanking you for your time contributing to this research study and providing me with more in depth information to gain a deeper understanding into the how leaders impact teacher wellness. Please feel free to keep your camera off if that makes you more comfortable.

For the purpose of our Focus Group today, there are a few terms I want to define. I will post them in the chat for your reference throughout the discussion.

- School Leader - This refers to any school leaders, principals, vice-principals or assistant principals.
- Favorable working environment - are the conditions created to ensure the teacher is able to maximize their potential within the building where they work, including the classroom and the school in general.
- Teacher wellness - Wellness as a dynamic process dependent on three criteria: (a) direction and progress toward a higher potential of functioning; (b) the total individual; which includes physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual components; (c) functioning and adapting for daily living and in times of crisis. More than just a surviving teacher, but a flourishing teacher.

- Professional Flourishing - construct that includes components of emotional (feeling good), psychological and social well-being (living well) in the work of teaching and learning. A feeling of working towards a greater purpose.

I would like to set a few Norms:

8. Everyone will be given a number, please write it down and say it before each time you respond, this will help me with my data analysis.
9. If you wish to respond or have an idea to add please use the raise hand feature and I will then know to ask you, otherwise we will move to the next question

I anticipate this focus group to take between 45 – 60 minutes. At the end of the questions I will provide each participant with an opportunity to share any final thoughts on the information you have shared to ensure I have captured the overall themes accurately. Are there any questions for clarification before we begin?

This concludes our focus group for today and I want to thank you all for your time.

(Other concluding remarks and send out \$10 coffee cards by mail. Please type your mailing address in the chat.

Appendix D: Specific Strategies Rated From Most Impactful to Least

1. a leader who supports my personal situations
2. a leader who celebrates successes within the school
3. a leader who ensures professional development is meaningful and valuable
4. a leader who provides me time to laugh and play together as a staff
5. a leader who praises me to show me I am appreciated
6. a leader who ensures my classroom is clean, safe, and suitable for learning
7. a leader who visits my classroom and gives me constructive feedback on my teaching practice
8. a leader who provides me opportunities to give input and feedback on the goals and vision of the school

Appendix E: List of Recommended Strategies

- Build trust
- Listen and respond practically to needs that emerge
- Ask teachers what they need
- Provide an opportunity to share what is going well, what is challenging, and work together to find solutions
- Clearly communicate expectations
- Share the staff meeting agenda prior to the meeting
- Share supervision schedules early so teachers can plan
- Don't have a meeting if the information can be sent in an email
- Check in with staff
- Genuinely ask teachers for input (not just as formality then ignore)
- Encourage a work-life balance
- Create an environment where it is acceptable to not be OK
- Delegate tasks to teachers with leadership qualities
- Make sure messaging is consistent to all staff
- Prioritize and take tasks off teachers' plates that are not important
- Never "voluntell"
- Increase collaborative time
- Free up some time on professional development days so teachers can do what they need to do
- Allow time to recharge in the day
- Acknowledge us for doing a good job

- Allow us to have a voice in decision-making
- Encourage us to come together as whole and build community
- Reduce class sizes
- Provide sufficient time to implement change