

Healthy Schools Start with Healthy Staff

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When we talk about school wellbeing, our focus often lands squarely on students. That's important, but there's growing evidence that student wellbeing and learning thrive when staff wellbeing is also a priority. If teachers are exhausted, stressed, or experiencing bullying, the positive climate schools work so hard to create can quickly unravel.

A recent scoping review (Avola et al., 2025) looked at 46 intervention studies and found most teacher programs targeted individual wellbeing (e.g., mindfulness, gratitude, physical activity), with growing attention to whole-staff/community strategies. Interventions tended to improve wellbeing when they were practical, time-efficient, and embedded in daily routines; sustainability depended on workload, leadership support, and fit with school context.

What are the takeaways?

- **Build individual skills but not in isolation.** Mindfulness, gratitude, and physical-activity programs often show positive effects for teachers; however, Avola et al. emphasise that combining self-regulation with co-regulation (peer and leadership support) is more powerful than “go it alone.”



- **Strengthen the workplace around teachers.** Programs are more effective and stickier when they're job-embedded, simple to implement, and supported by leaders who protect time and help with follow-through.
- **Aim for “individual + community.”** Avola et al. explicitly coded whether interventions targeted individuals, communities, or both; the upshot is that system-level conditions matter as much as personal coping.

Why school climate is the linchpin

Across Australian samples Harrison et al., (2025) show that a supportive school climate, one that nurtures teachers' basic psychological needs for **autonomy**, **competence**, and **relatedness**, is strongly linked with teacher wellbeing. Simply, when teachers feel trusted, capable, and connected, they have the energy and motivation students need from them every day.

The cost of ignoring bullying and psychosocial risks

- Kollerová et al., (2023) found that teacher exhaustion increases with disruptive student behaviour and victimisation by workplace bullying, while leadership support is linked with lower exhaustion and lower levels of disruptive behaviour (N≈740).
- McFarland et al., (2024) reported 24.6% of Australian early-childhood staff experienced workplace bullying, most often from co-workers; protective factors included positive teamwork, good supervisor relations, lower stressors, and influence over decisions.
- Hickey (2024) meta-analysis focusing on Australian schools shows occupational violence and aggression (OVA) undermines teacher wellbeing and is tied to stress, burnout, and retention risks, reinforcing the case for coherent policy and proactive leadership, not just individual coping.



Why this matters for students

When teachers' wellbeing improves, classroom climate and teacher-student relationships improve too; that's one pathway by which interventions can lift student outcomes. Avola et al. connect many effective strategies to relationships (R) and health (H) within the PERMA-H framework, precisely the elements that shape students' day-to-day experience.

Practical action for schools

1. Make wellbeing a whole-school responsibility.

Pair individual supports (e.g., brief mindfulness or gratitude practices) with team routines, peer coaching, and protected time.

2. **Design for reality.** Choose short, job-embedded activities teachers can use tomorrow; avoid one-off workshops with no follow-through.

3. **Lead for needs.** Train leaders to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness; monitor workload and signal that wellbeing time is legitimate.

4. **Prevent bullying and anti-social interaction.** Establish clear reporting, swift responses, and proactive teamwork norms; measure climate and act on findings.



References

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