



The Mental Health Crisis in Independent Schools

Nina L. Kumar



AC's team consists of experienced researchers, clinicians, and consultants who are dedicated to fostering resilience in schools

Nina Kumar
Co-Founder & CEO



- Former product mgmt at IBM Watson Health
- BA Computer Science and Psychology, Williams College



Suniya Luthar, Ph. D.
Co-Founder Emerita



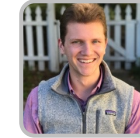
Lisa Pao, Ph. D.
Director of Research



Renee Benoit
Scientific Researcher



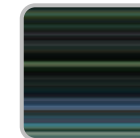
Steve Lee, Ph. D.
Consultant; Professor at UCLA



Harrison Tool
VP of Engagement



Nicole Zillmer, Ph. D.
Scientific Researcher



Stephanie Ramsey, Ph. D.
Scientific Researcher

Focus of today's discussion

1

Summarize background: What we do, and the underlying science

2

Review the current state of student, faculty, & staff mental health in independent schools

3

Explore recommendations and best practices to maximize resilience

Problem: parents, teachers, and administrators face many challenges in supporting the mental health of their communities



Depression and anxiety are rising among adolescents and adults nationwide



Challenges to well-being are constantly changing



Students, faculty, and parents are stretched for time and resources



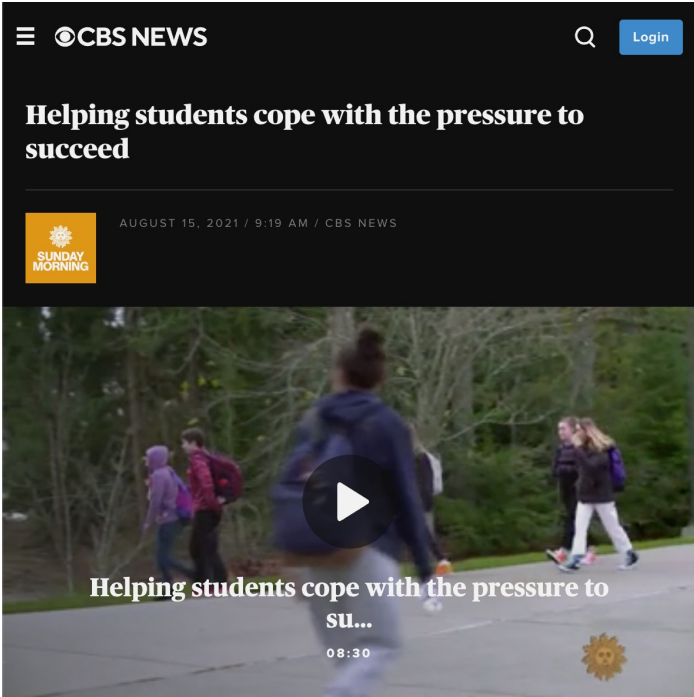
School communities typically track achievement, but have not established systems to monitor mental health

Students at high achieving schools have been named an “at-risk” group



On Parenting • Perspective
Students in high-achieving schools are now named an ‘at-risk’ group, study says

By Jennifer Breheny Wallace
September 26, 2019

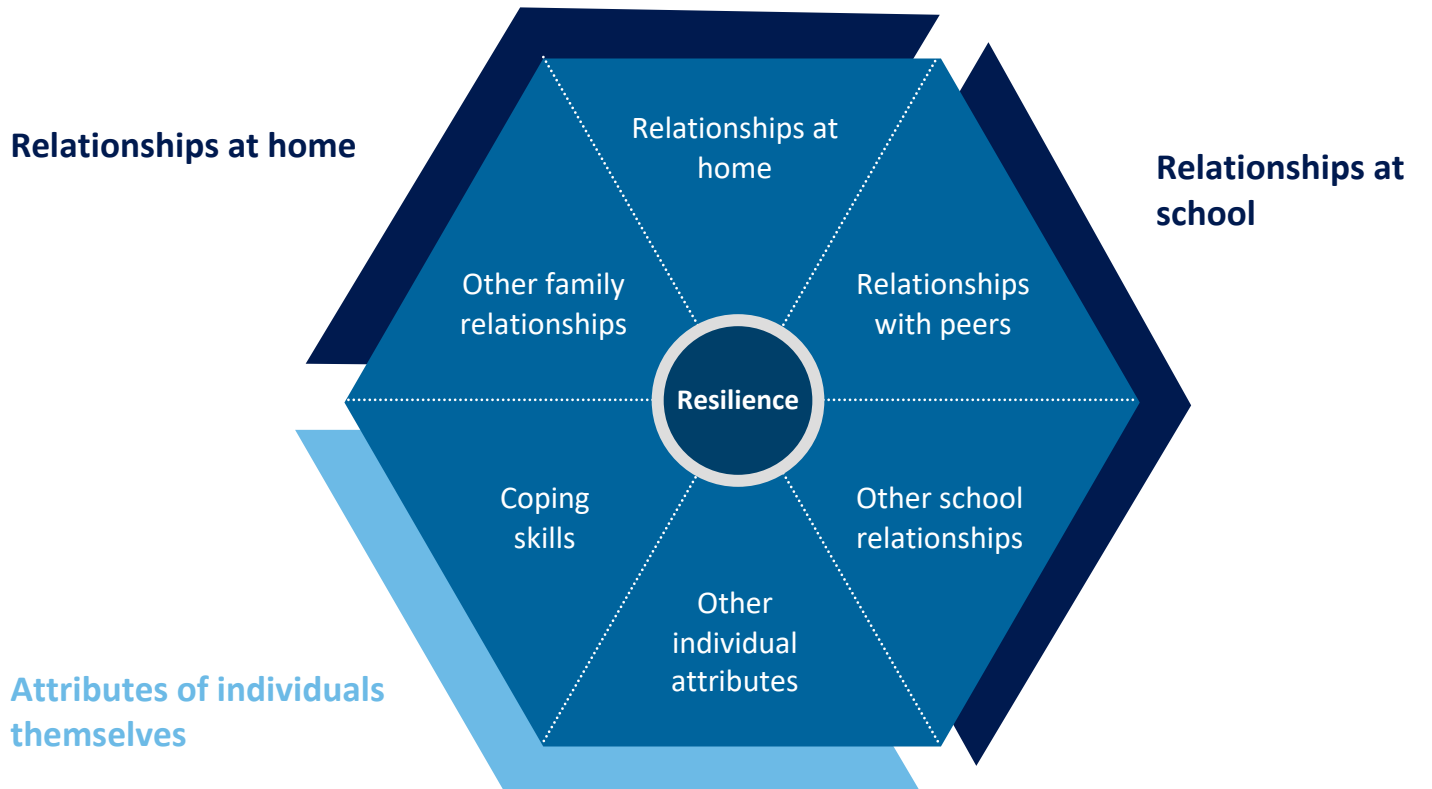


The Washington Post



To address this problem, we must proactively foster resilience

Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships

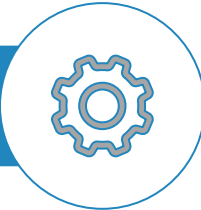


In relation to mental health, “bad is stronger than good”

The protective benefit of positive aspects of relationships is often outweighed by the harm done by the negative aspects

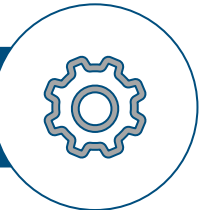
AC helps school and districts measure and improve well-being by determining high priority focus areas and next steps

1. Assess mental health



Understand how the community is faring on indices of mental health, such as **on anxiety, depression, and burnout**

2. Use converging evidence to determine focus areas



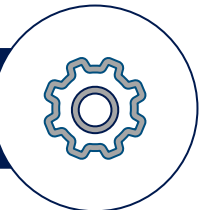
'Drivers' of well-being

Which aspects of school climate are **most related to** mental health difficulties?

Areas for Improvement

Which themes are **most often mentioned** as areas for improvement?

3. Determine recommendations and next steps



Focus Areas & Recommendations

Recommendations based on:

- Unique findings within the school
- Best practices from resilience research
- Guidance gleaned from work with other schools

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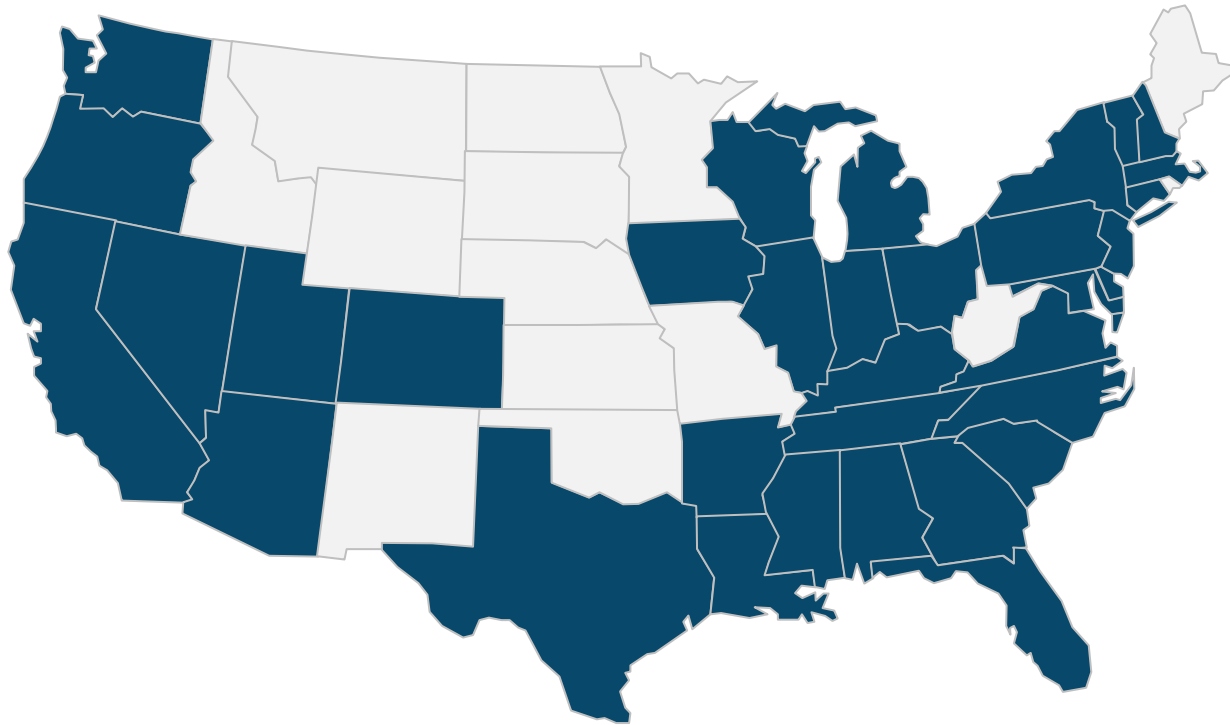
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We have assessed wellbeing at over 150 schools since March 2020

States Where AC Surveys Have Been Used



150+ schools

65,000+ students

12,000+ educators

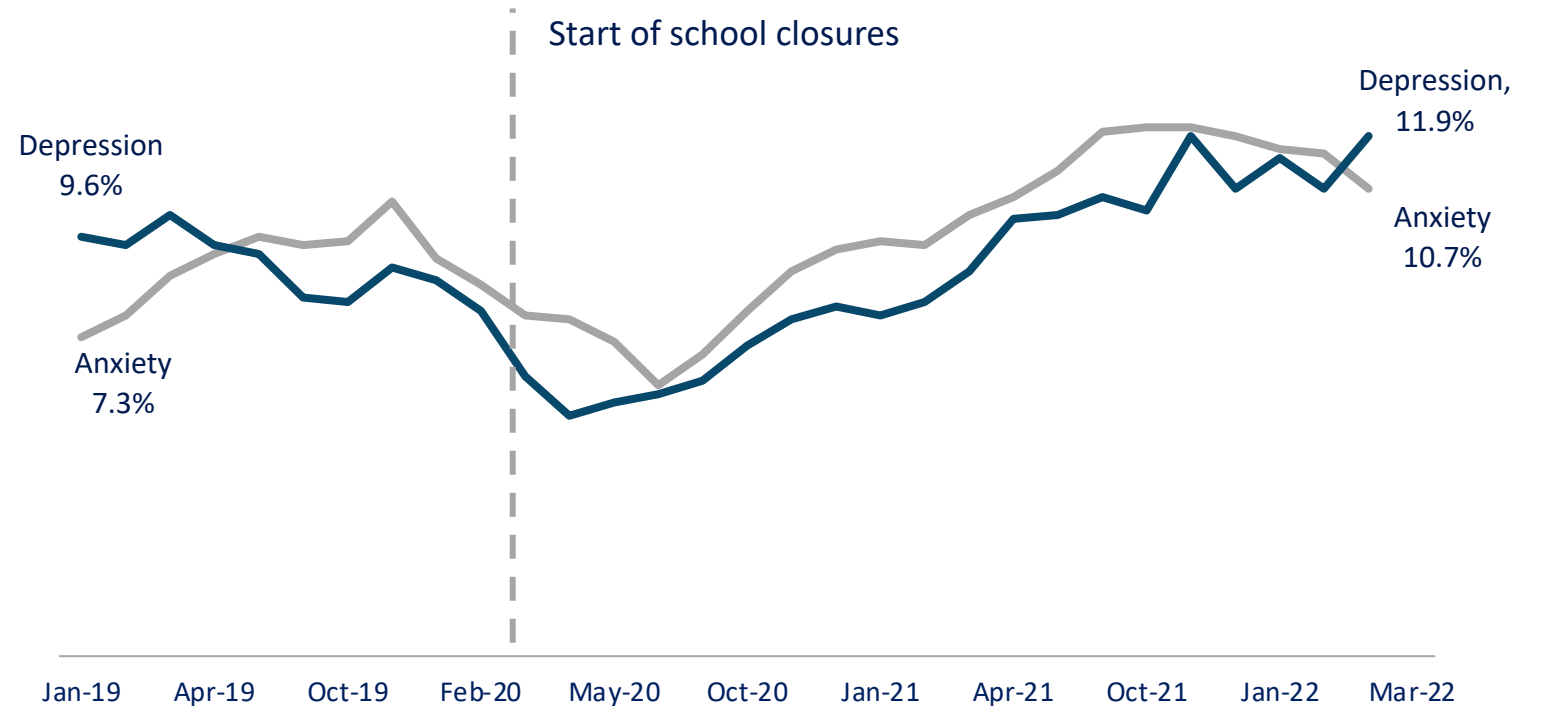
Among students, rates of depression and anxiety have risen after initially dropping at the start of the pandemic

12%

Of students show clinically significant levels of depression

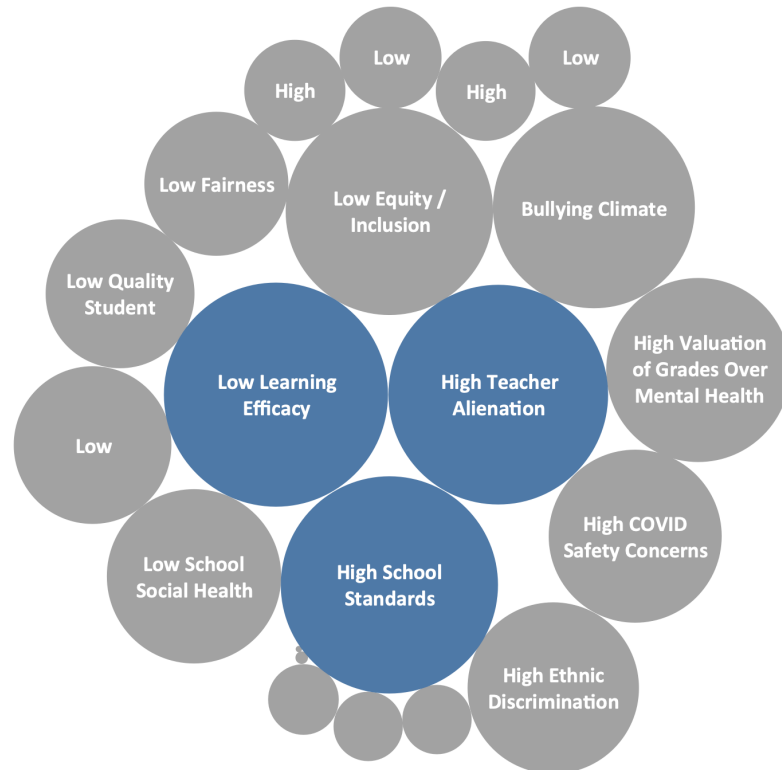
11%

Of students show clinically significant levels of anxiety



In fall 2021, the aspects of school climate most linked with student mental health struggles were learning efficacy, teacher alienation & standards

Top Potential Drivers of Well-Being

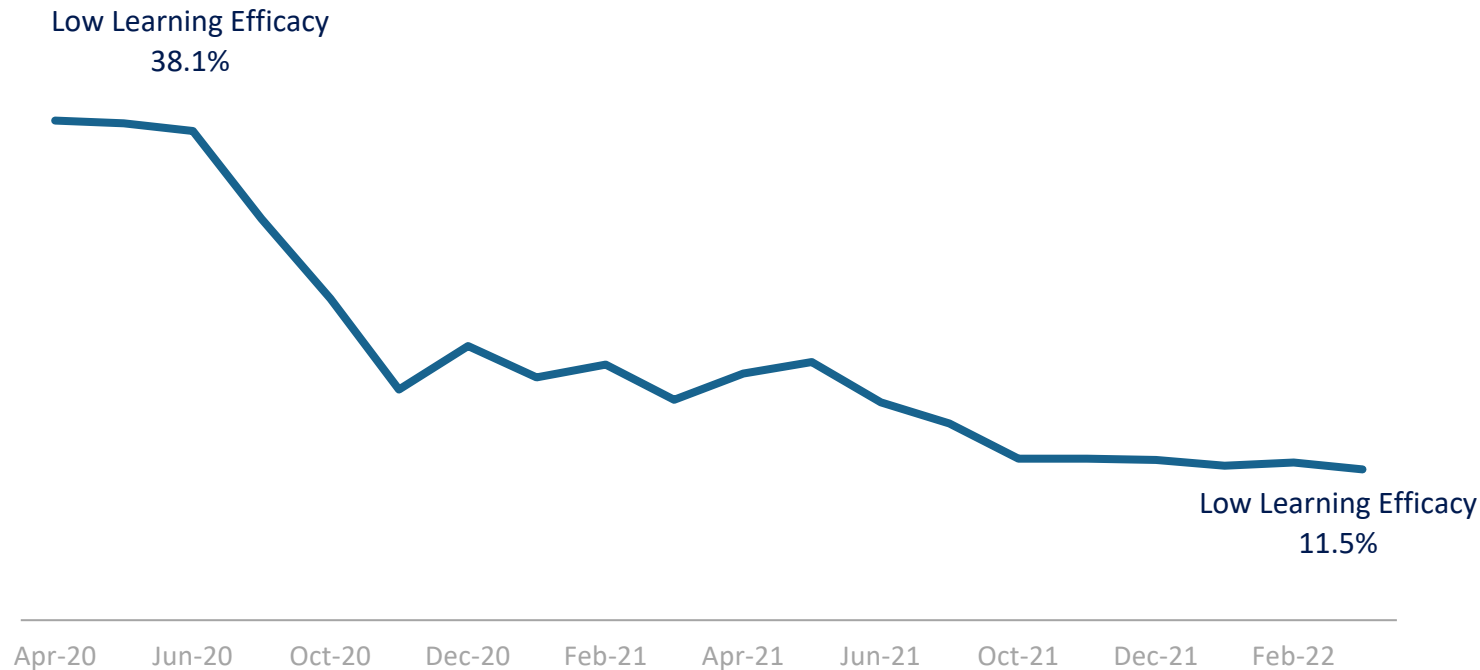


Size indicates relative strength of relationship with well-being

“I think that sometimes teachers do not realize that some things do not come as easily for some than others. When **they say things like "this is easy" or "you should know this," it does nothing to help further our education** and just **makes us feel worse** about how we learn. I think the teachers could learn to be more aware of what they say and how it could impact the students because I think that sometimes when they say things they are saying what they think and believe and but **they do not realize how it negatively impacts us.**”

- Student Free Response, Fall 2021

Rates of students reporting learning difficulties have decreased, but learning efficacy is still closely linked with mental health struggles



“I am most worried about keeping up my mental health while keeping up good grades. My grades are slipping and I have three classes that I'm not doing well in. I am so stressed and some of my teachers aren't willing to work with me.”

- Student Free Response, Fall 2021

Regarding areas of school strength, students commonly highlight: faculty emotional support, structure/schedule, and faculty communication and support

Free Responses: Areas of School Strength



Categories		
Academic Workload ~8,500 mentions	Connections and Support ~13,800 mentions	Personal ~4,000 mentions
Total Mentions = ~26,300		

Faculty Emotional Support

- *“Before this year, I had never even considered talking to a counselor, but **they have been great resources for me and have provided me with tremendous support** that has gotten me through my notably lower morale during this school year.”*
- *“**My advisors genuinely care about me and want the best for me.**”*

Structure / Schedule

- *“**Giving us a break in the school day** has been a huge help. This has **allowed me to see friends that I haven’t seen for a while**, and it makes the day go faster.”*

Faculty Communication / Support - General

- *“**The school has been listening to the students more now than ever.** They’re rethinking some of the way things are done, and it’s having a positive impact.”*

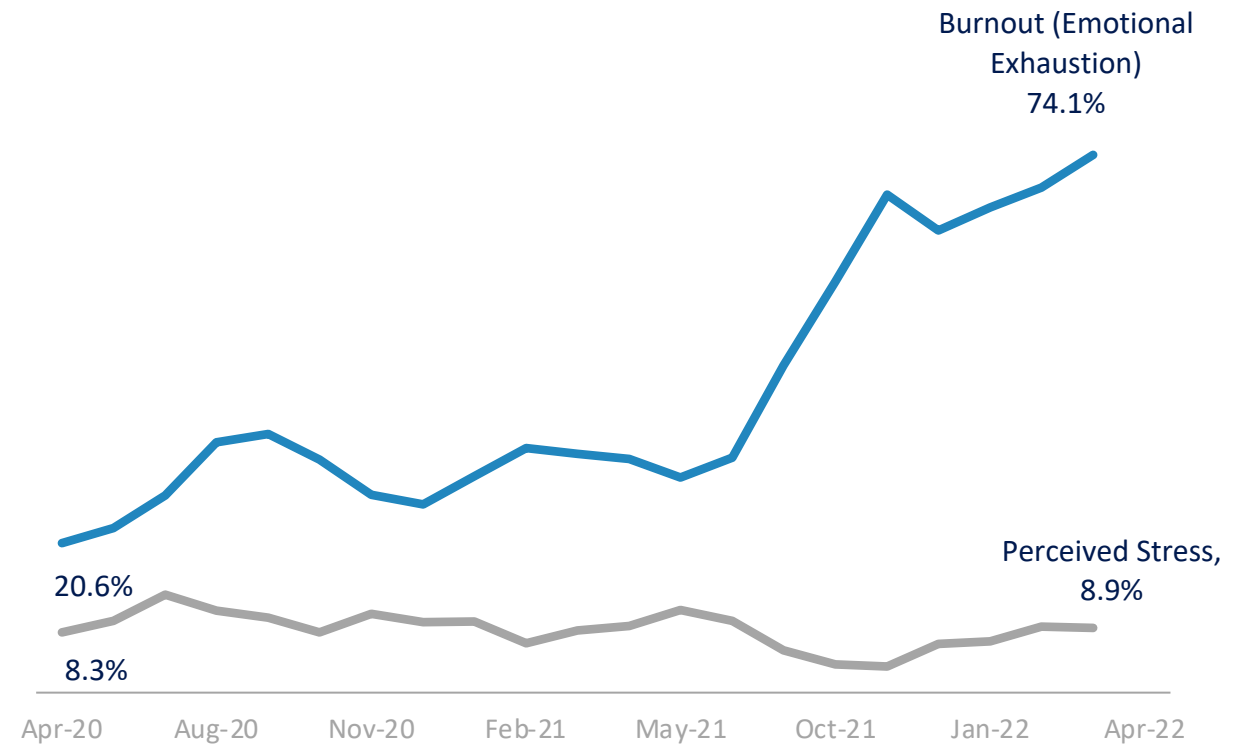
Among faculty, rates of high burnout at work have increased since the start of the academic year

74%

Of educators show clinically significant levels of burnout at work

9%

Of educators show clinically significant levels of general stress



Note: findings from ~7,000 school adults surveyed during the pandemic

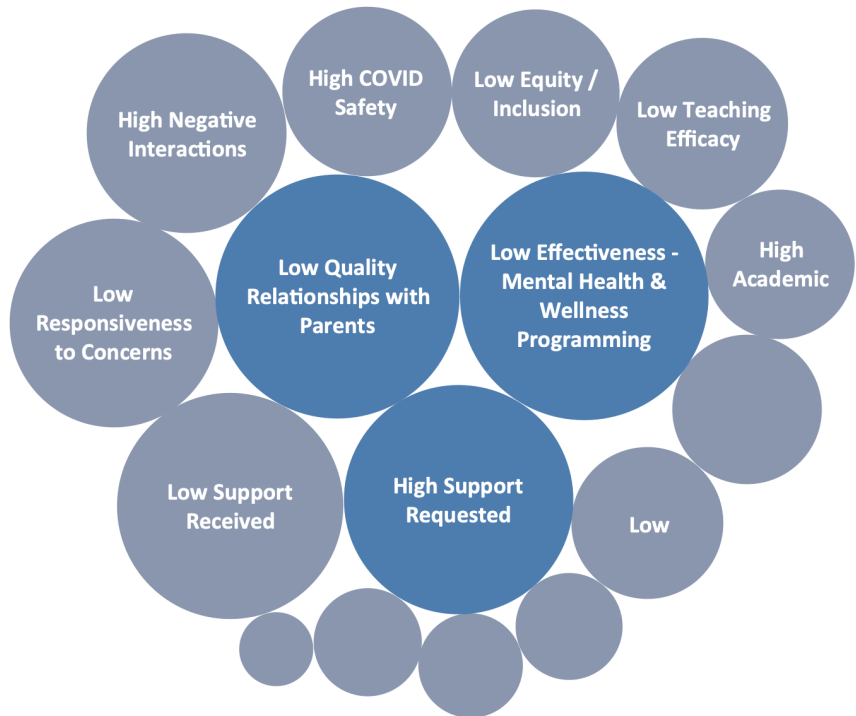
“

“Last year there was a great deal of empathy for what our employees were going through... This year that empathy seems to be completely gone... In general, there is just a lack of empathy around us... I don't know the solution, but something does have to give somewhere...”

- Faculty member, Fall 2021

In fall 2021, support requested, effectiveness of wellness programming, and parent relationships were most linked with staff mental health

Top Potential Drivers of Well-Being



Size indicates relative strength of relationship with well-being

“Overall I am feeling **mental and physical exhaustion**. There is an **overhanging feeling of pressure** coming from the school channeled **from parents** (and the greater society) for us to **fix all the problems** of the last 2 years and to do it asap. The pressures to fix so much so fast is **draining teachers.**”

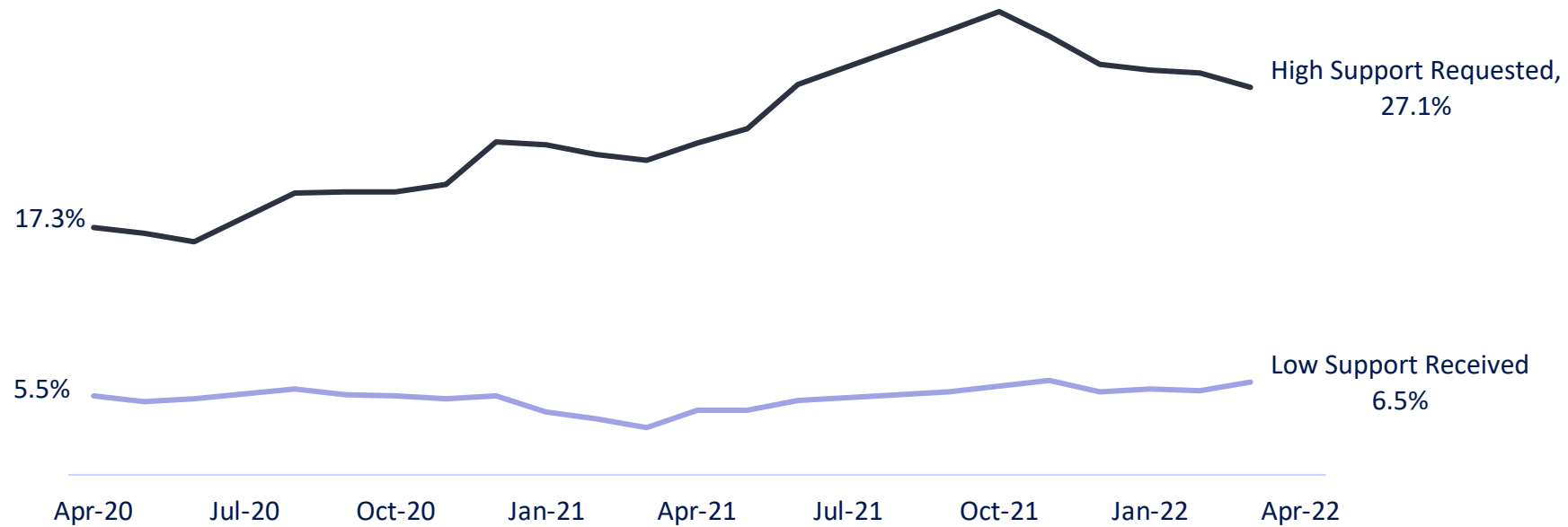
- Faculty member, Fall 2021

“Last year we had one day a month as a prep/mental health day. **They saved me.** This year we do not while trying to regain **full schedule while also still dealing with a pandemic...**”

- Faculty member, Fall 2021

Rates of educators reporting low support received were consistently low, but there were sharp increases in percentages reporting high support requested

Support Requested and Received Over Time



Regarding areas of school strength, faculty / staff commonly highlight admin. concern/support, structure/schedule, & colleague connection

Free Responses: Areas of School Strength



Admin Concern / Support

- *“Reaching out to us almost every day, providing opportunities to chat, surveying us regularly to find out how we are doing, communicating often!”*

Structure / Schedule

- *“Giving us extra days off. Lighter schedule. Less expectation of extra-curriculars. Shorter class times. Food in the mornings and lunch or anytime we have to meet is always a time saver.”*

Colleague Connection

- *“There has been a lot of care and thought given to making sure we allow time to lift one another up. This is refreshing, and something that we didn't specifically spend time on previously.”*

Categories			
Well-Being ~1,600 mentions	Support / Interpersonal ~5,700 mentions	Academic Delivery ~2,100 mentions	Job Expectations ~1,700 mentions
Total mentions = ~11,100			

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Practice 1: Ensure that those caring for others feel emotionally supported themselves

Focus Areas

- Faculty / Staff:
 - Effectiveness of mental health programming
 - Support requested
 - Parent interactions
- Students
 - Teacher alienation

Principles

- Remember the science that “resilience rests on relationships”; all need ongoing support
- Make time and space for community members to openly share their worries and concerns
- Encourage the community to constructively discuss the pain and strife caused by the pandemic
- Be mindful of stress spilling into hostility in relationships

In Practice

- “When things have been stressful politically, we have had space to talk about it. And I'm so grateful for that because it has been hard to process. When I needed time to cope with loss, I could take it. My value as an employee and as a person is regularly affirmed, and I'm grateful for that because sometimes it's easy to forget.”

Practice 2: Foster a commitment to mental health

Focus Areas

- Faculty / Staff:
 - Effectiveness of mental health programming
- Students
 - School standards

Principles

- Set high expectations, but make it clear that this should never be at the expense of overall well-being
- Frequently remind the community of available mental health resources
- Foster a continuous discussion around mental health

In Practice

- “There are many mental health and student health groups in the school. There are many support systems.”
- “I feel supported. If I need anything from resources for my classroom or time off for mental health, I do feel comfortable asking for those things and know I will be met with a yes.”

Practice 3: Promote visibility and strong communication

Focus Areas

- Faculty / Staff:
 - Support requested
- Students
 - Learning efficacy

Principles

- Consider having administrators shadow faculty and staff for a day. This will help faculty/staff feel seen and will illuminate potential issues
- As much as possible, try to communicate with staff frequently about any changes to plans and procedures for the school
- Frequently remind students of when, where, and how to get the extra help they need

In Practice

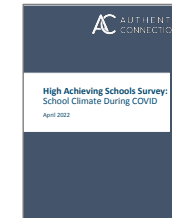
- “Staff and admin are good at communicating thanks and appreciation. Furthermore, my direct supervisor is flexible with schedules in a way that centers the well-being of staff and their obligations. There is a transparency on expectations and deadlines that improves staff morale.”

Recent developments

Current Surveys

	Students (Grades 2-5)	Students (Grades 6-12)		Faculty / Staff	Parents / Families
		Children's Resilience Survey (CRS)	Student Resilience Survey (SRS)	High Achieving Schools Survey (HASS)	Faculty Resilience Survey (FRS)
Survey Length	15 Minutes	15 Minutes	30 Minutes	15 Minutes	15 Minutes
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A short, easily-understood survey for students in grades 2-5 that captures actionable information about well-being and student relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides schools with data on how students are doing on top indicators of well-being and modifiable aspects of school life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a deep dive on student well-being and targeted recommendations across peer relationships, parent relationships, and school climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives voice to all faculty / staff, providing school leaders with the insights they need to improve employee well-being and reduce burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers parents / guardians an opportunity to provide feedback on the school experience

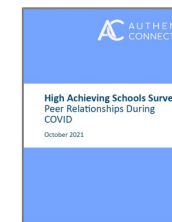
Research & Publications



High Achieving Schools Survey: School Climate During COVID
April 2022
bit.ly/HASS_SchoolClimate



COVID-19 and Resilience in Schools: Implications for Practice and Policy
December 2021
bit.ly/COVIDandResilience



High Achieving Schools Survey: Peer Relationships During COVID
October 2021
bit.ly/HASSPeerRelationships



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Nina Kumar

Co-founder and CEO

NLKumar@authconn.com



Harrison Tool,

VP Engagement

Htool@authconn.com

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