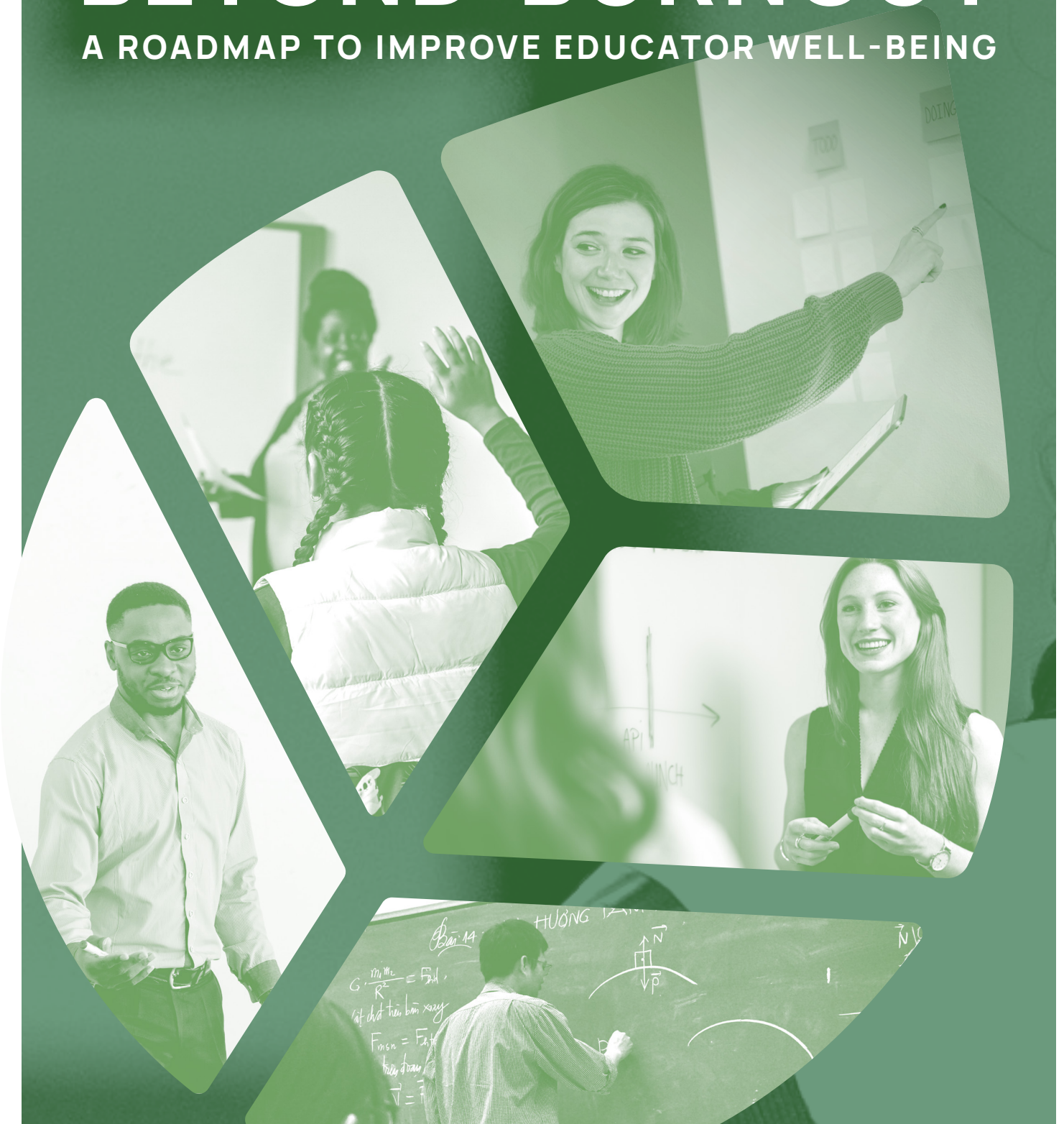


BEYOND BURNOUT

A ROADMAP TO IMPROVE EDUCATOR WELL-BEING



A Union of Professionals

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EDUCATORS
THRIVING



BEYOND BURNOUT:

A ROADMAP TO IMPROVE EDUCATOR WELL-BEING

In 2022, for the first time since the National Assessment of Educational Progress began testing students in the 1970s, scores in math dropped. Reading scores fell by the largest margin seen in 30 years.¹ The pandemic had devastating consequences on student development—both academically and socio-emotionally. Addressing these crises will take solutions at multiple levels—all of which require adults in schools to be reaching ever closer to their full professional potential. But the teachers and school-related personnel on the front lines who are tasked with solving this problem are not experiencing well-being.

There is a critical link between student and teacher relationships, well-being, and developmental outcomes.² Education leaders must tend to the well-being of staff so that they can tend to the learning and well-being of their students. It is far too easy to succumb to the narrative that problematically high educator attrition is somehow unavoidable—that burnout is inevitable in this profession.

AFT's and Educators Thriving's joint efforts suggest something entirely different: educators want to enjoy their jobs and stay committed to their work. They care deeply about their impact. Their well-being can, in fact, be improved. Now is the time for individual and systemic solutions that enable educators to do their best work.

THE PROBLEM

Staff shortages—alarming before the pandemic began—are now at crisis levels. **Intentions to leave the profession have continued to climb for both teachers and principals**, and schools remain understaffed across all positions.¹ Leaders, families, and educators themselves are calling for us to attend to the well-being of our educator workforce, but no consensus exists about what this means. While some districts are in fact taking action, too few solutions address the systemic factors contributing to our current challenges.

¹ National Assessment of Educational Progress, [The Nation's Report Card](#), 2022.

² Harding, S., Morris, R., Gunnell, D., Ford, T., Hollingworth, W., Tilling, K., Evans, R., Bell, S., Grey, J., Brockman, R., Campbell, R., Araya, R., Murphy, S. & Kidger, J. (2019). "Is teachers' mental health and wellbeing associated with students' mental health and wellbeing?" *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 242, 180-187.



A TWO-PRONGED SOLUTION

To better support and retain educators, we need both broad, system-wide changes as well as immediate relief. Educators Thriving and the AFT joined forces in a two-pronged approach. AFT members in 11 locals across the country participated in either 1) a personal development course to immediately address individual well-being or 2) a rigorous research process to develop an educator-generated well-being scale so that we can meaningfully equip leaders to measure and improve well-being system-wide.

Equipping Individual Educators

A group of 222 educators completed a well-being professional development program during the summer and fall of 2022. They learned about strategies empirically proven to increase well-being, spent time connecting with fellow educators in small groups, and practiced applying new tools to their personal and professional lives. The program was well received: **92% of participants agreed that the program has made their job feel more sustainable** and **94% agreed that it helped improve their well-being.**

Creating an Educator-Generated Definition of Well-being

Educators Thriving, in partnership with AFT members, sought to create a definition of well-being—and an accompanying survey tool—generated by educators. Educators Thriving led a series of focus groups with educators from across the country and developed a preliminary measure based on key themes. Nationwide, 1,285 AFT members completed the pilot survey. Statistical analysis found that a 26-item scale composed of **six key predictive factors reliably measured educator well-being.**

SIX PREDICTIVE FACTORS OF WELL-BEING



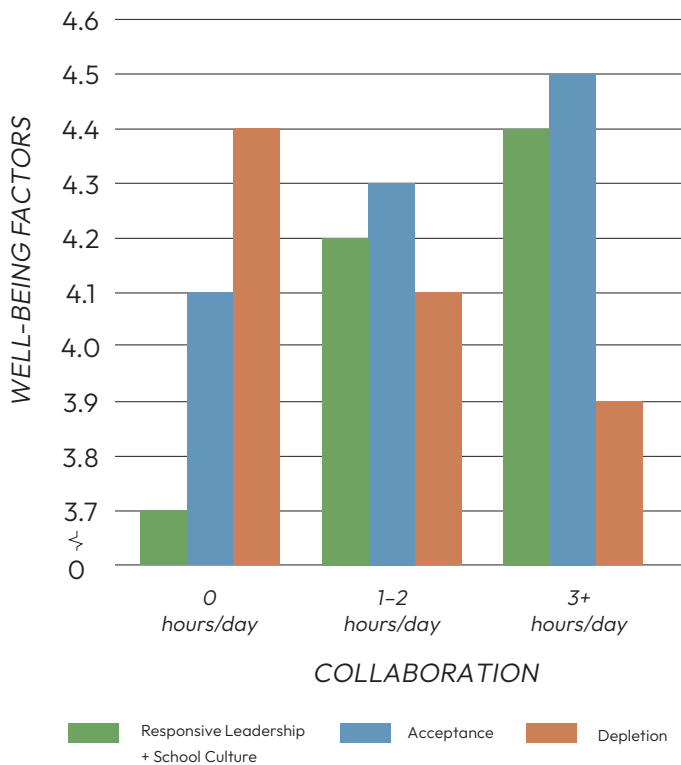


THE STATE OF EDUCATOR WELL-BEING

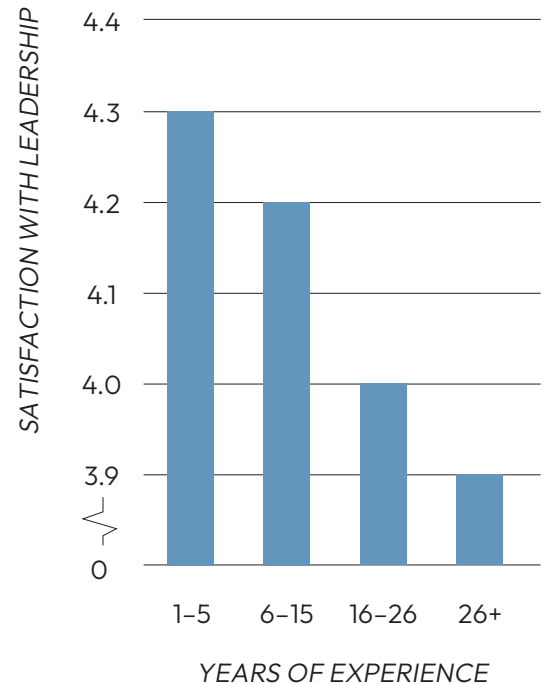
Results suggest that educators are feeling depleted, but they are not giving up; they are committed to the profession but need greater support from leadership:

- 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they “continually try to grow as an educator,” yet half of them also agreed or strongly agreed that “at the end of the day, I am too exhausted to do anything.”
- Less than half of respondents felt administrators take their concerns seriously; less than a third receive the relevant information they need in time to plan.
- Educators who reported the most hours of collaboration reported the highest levels of overall well-being, while those with more years of experience reported felt less supported by administrators.

IMPACT OF COLLABORATION ON WELL-BEING

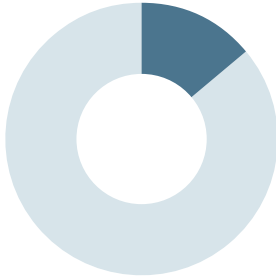


IMPACT OF EXPERIENCE ON WELL-BEING

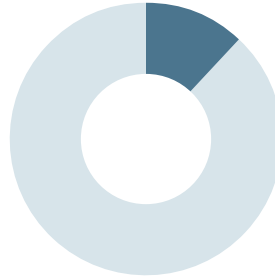




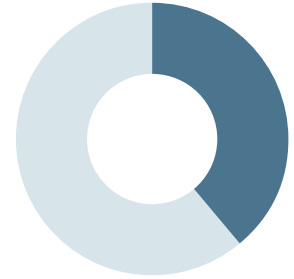
FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORTS + BURNOUT



14% of respondents feel they are adequately compensated for the work they do



12% of respondents feel they have the staff they need to adequately meet student needs



39% of respondents feel their school buildings are physically and emotionally safe

LESSONS LEARNED

Educator well-being can in fact be improved when it is meaningfully prioritized. AFT members reported significant improvements in their well-being after engaging in experiences to develop personal and professional skills to navigate the demands of the job. However, equipping individual educators to increase their own workplace well-being is necessary, but it is not sufficient. We must also consider how to change systems to create the conditions that foster educator well-being and retention. Typically, well-being is measured by its absence—levels of burnout and attrition—but we have not had a “north star” to meaningfully measure what allows educators to truly be well and thrive in their professional capacities. We do now.

Supplement Professional Development with Personal Development

Program results suggest that there are tangible strategies educators can apply to their personal and professional lives to reduce burnout and increase well-being. Many participants shared that it was one of the **“most meaningful PDs they have ever participated in”** and walked away feeling **equipped, empowered, and deeply connected** to others across their district.



Listen First

Throughout this process, we centered educator experiences to define well-being, yielding a definition and survey tool that are not only guided by rigorous research but are also grounded in educator voices and reflect the elements of well-being that are meaningful to educators themselves.

Measure What Matters

If we aim to improve educator well-being, system leaders must measure the specific job elements that tend to predict well-being as defined by educators. While the focus group conversations revealed a number of themes that matter to educators, **piloting the survey alongside other validated measures of well-being revealed six key factors that actually predict well-being.** The final 26 items offer actionable strategies that enable all stakeholders in the education ecosystem to improve how they support educators.

Move Forward, Together

We are seeing the power and potential of collaboration around educator well-being across the nation. **With a meaningful and measurable definition of educator well-being, we can spark improvements within individuals and across systems.** Education leaders equipped with actionable data can understand subgroup trends, set goals around shared priorities, make improvements, and measure their progress to make meaningful system-wide shifts where they are needed most. **We must create positive working and learning conditions for all—too much is at stake if we don't.**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about Educators Thriving at www.educatorsthiving.org. Access extensive reports and toolkits by scanning or clicking the QR code.





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EDUCATORS
THRIVING

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