



Leveraging Collective Efficacy for Students and Educators

By Dr. Jenni Donohoo

When educators believe in their collective ability to overcome external challenges to improve student learning, it can do amazing things for their students. This same shared belief can also do amazing things for educators, impacting their well-being in a very positive way. Findings show that a strong sense of collective efficacy results in resilience and increased job satisfaction. It can also help reduce stress and teacher burnout.

Collective teacher efficacy (CTE) is the shared perception of educators that their combined ability can impact student achievement over and above influences outside the school, including students' home environments and socio-economic status.

Research supports the positive relationship between educators' beliefs about their collective ability to influence student outcomes and their well-being. Studies show that collective efficacy beliefs are a main determinant of teachers' job satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003; Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010). In a Canadian study involving 951 elementary and secondary school teachers, Klassen (2010) found that collective efficacy not only predicted job satisfaction, it also lowered teachers' stress attributed to student misbehaviour. In addition, Lim and Eo's (2014) research demonstrated that "when teachers perceived their school's capability as a whole to be higher, they were more unlikely to get burnout" (p. 144).

Well-being and student outcomes

While educators' well-being is important to educators in helping them cope with the pressures and demands of teaching, their well-being in turn contributes to the well-being of their students.

Educators who are physically and mentally well are not only more likely to engage in caring and sensitive relationships with each other, they will also have an easier time nurturing healthy relationships with their students. This is important because the relationships teachers have with their students have important, long-lasting implications for their students' social development and academic success. Hattie (2012) ranked teacher-student relationship amongst the top 15 factors that influence student achievement and gave it an effect size of 0.72. This was in a meta-analysis that examined over 150,000 effect sizes. When teacher-student relationships are strong, students are more likely to come to school, have a sense of trust and cohesion in the classroom, and ultimately attain better grades.

Research also shows that better teacher-student relationships lead to better attendance. Cornelius-White (2007) found that the reason that many students did not want to attend class or why they disliked school was primarily because they disliked their teacher. Better relationships also help to establish cohesion in classrooms. Hattie (2009) defined classroom cohesion as "the sense that all (teachers and students) are working towards positive learning gains" (p. 103). Students' perceptions of trust and classroom cohesion depend upon positive interpersonal relations and social support from peers and adults. Hattie (2009) noted, "in situations with greater cohesiveness it is more likely that there is co-peer learning, tolerance and welcoming of error, and thus, increased feedback, and more discussion of goals, success criteria, and positive teacher-student and student-student relationships" (p. 103). Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between these variables.

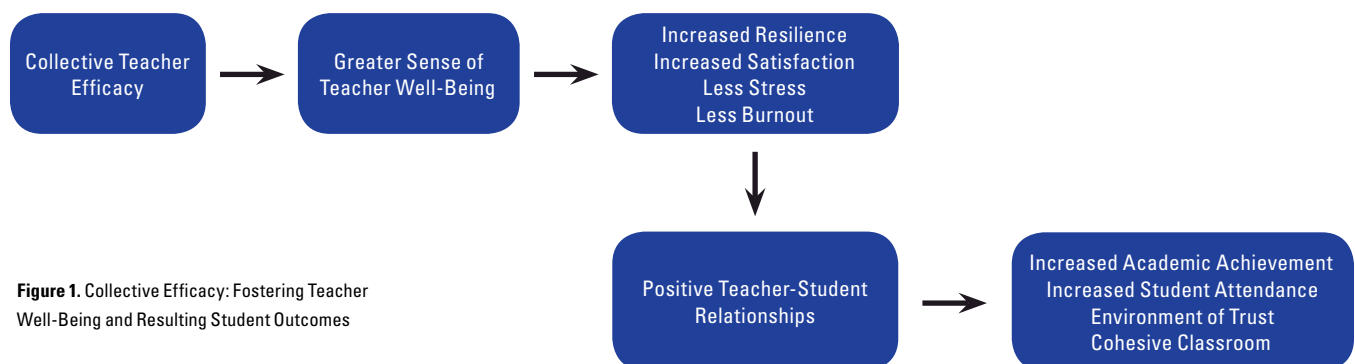


Figure 1. Collective Efficacy: Fostering Teacher Well-Being and Resulting Student Outcomes

What can principals do?

All school administrators need to understand how to instill collective efficacy in their staff and leverage it to promote well-being in their schools. Research findings can help shed light on the importance of collective efficacy and the steps that principals can take in their schools.

According to Avanzia, Schuhb, Fraccarolia, and Van Dick (2015) the social support teachers received from each other contributed to collective efficacy, which in turn represented an important resource to dealing with stressors. Haworth, McGee and McIntrye (2013) found that collective efficacy emerged when teachers felt a sense

of belonging. In addition, Bandura (2001) noted that strong social systems "instil a robust sense of efficacy" (p. 22). Furthermore, Moolenaar, Slegers and Daly (2012) found that collective teacher efficacy was dependent on the relationships leveraged and the resources accessed through social networks. The authors concluded, "by exchanging knowledge, sharing experiences, and collectively searching for solutions to problems of practice, teachers may build confidence in their team's collective capability to motivate students, offer a targeted instructional program in support of student learning, and handle difficult situations" (p. 253).

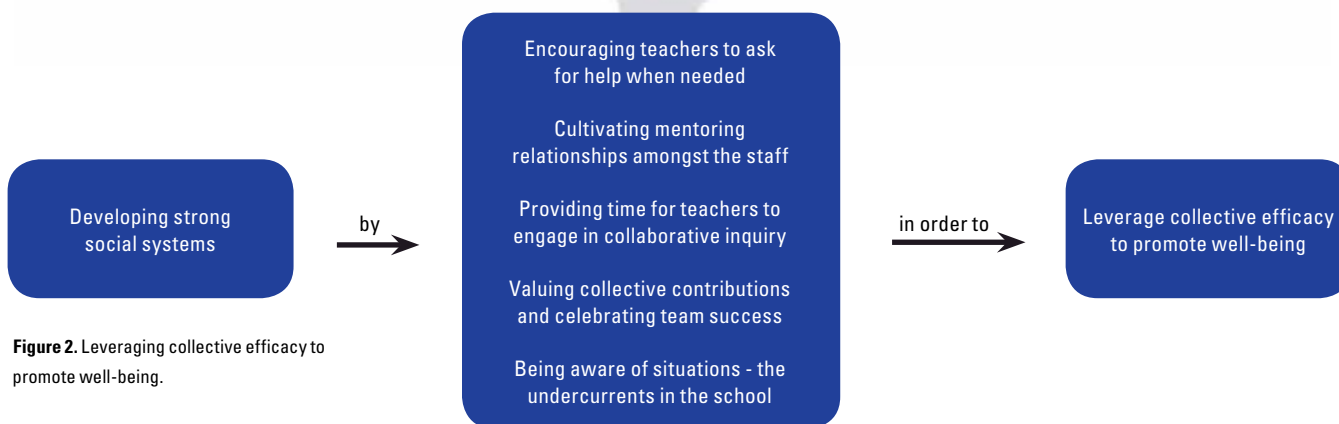


Figure 2. Leveraging collective efficacy to promote well-being.

Principals and other administrators can help build strong social systems (Figure 2) by encouraging teachers to ask for help when needed, cultivating mentoring relationships amongst the staff, providing time and structures for teachers to collaboratively solve dilemmas, valuing contributions that result from team work, and celebrating team successes.

In addition, principals must exercise situational awareness. “Situational awareness addresses leaders’ awareness of the details and the undercurrents regarding the functioning of the school” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 60). Marzano et al. (2005) examined responsibilities of school leaders and their correlations with student academic achievement and ranked situational awareness as number one. Specific behaviours and characteristics associated with situational awareness include: (a) accurately predicting what could go wrong from day to day; (b) being aware of the informal groups and relationships among the staff; and (c) being aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord.

To illustrate, school leaders demonstrate situational awareness when they anticipate anxieties that might

result during busy times of the school year (e.g. administration of EQAO/OSSLT) and involve staff in determining ways to provide support (and ways they can support each other) and resources in an effort to alleviate stress.

Bandura (1977) noted that “people rely partly on their state of physiological arousal in judging their anxiety and vulnerability to stress” (p. 198). These affective states are a source that contributes to collective teacher efficacy. By helping to alleviate anxiety through the creation of strong social systems amongst staff, school leaders can influence a staff’s interpretation of their effectiveness. The resulting outcomes, both a greater sense of well-being and positive experiences for students, are important for both educators and their students. [CP](#)

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