

Identifying and Addressing Underlying Causes of School Staff Stress & Well-Being

Presented by

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Introductions



Cheryl Holm-Hansen, PhD



Mark Sander, PsyD

**Please introduce
yourself in the chat!**

Three session series



September 11:

**Roadmap to understanding and assessing school staff stress
and burnout**

Three session series



September 11:

Roadmap to understanding and assessing school staff stress and burnout



September 18:

Strategies to effectively address root causes of school staff stress and burnout

Three session series



September 11:

Roadmap to understanding and assessing school staff stress and burnout



September 18:

Strategies to effectively address root causes of school staff stress and burnout



September 25:

Creating and successfully implementing a plan to address root causes of school staff stress and burnout

Midwest Center for School Mental Health

BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR STAFF WELL-BEING

A Toolkit for Addressing the Root
Causes of School Staff Stress and Burnout



Cheryl A. Holm-Hansen, PhD
Mark Sander, PsyD

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Upcoming toolkit

- Recommended approach for identifying needs, prioritizing solutions, and making changes
- Best current evidence for specific staff stress-reduction strategies
- Strategies for ensuring successful implementation and systems change

Toolkit will be shared with all attendees at the conclusion of the series

Upcoming learning/consultation series



Planning for an 8-session learning/consultation cohort is underway

More information will be shared at an upcoming session

Today's agenda



Recap – What is our process for addressing school staff stress and burnout?



Strategies – What can we do to promote staff well-being?



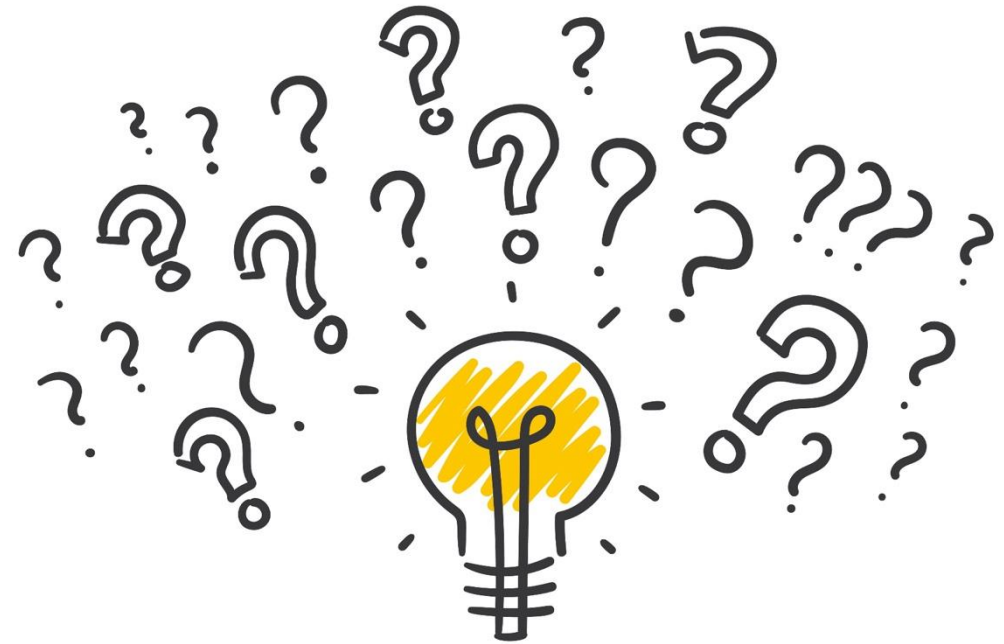
Look forward – What will the final session cover?

What do you think?



What do you think?

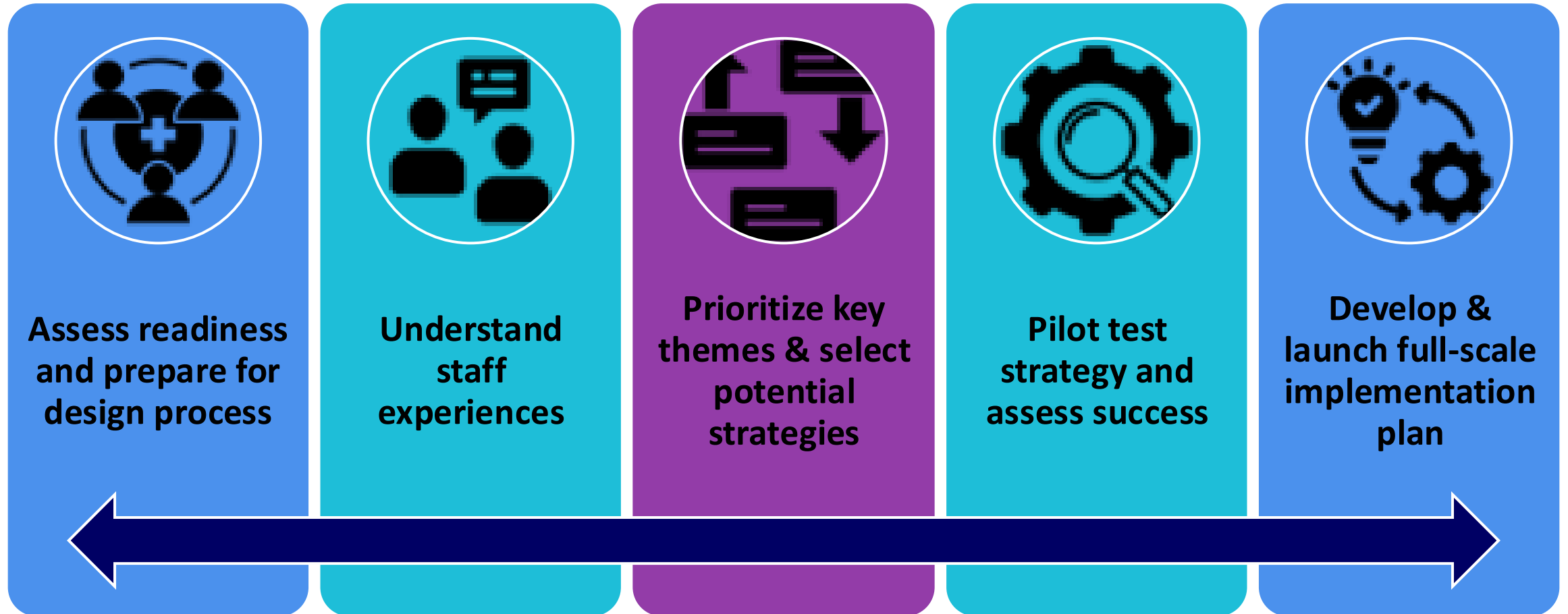
If you joined us last week,
do you have any questions
that we should address
before we move on?



The slide features a dark blue background with decorative geometric patterns at the top and bottom. These patterns consist of multiple parallel lines in shades of purple, blue, and teal, forming a series of connected triangles and zig-zags. A large, empty rectangular box with a thin purple border is centered on the slide, containing the word "Recap" in white text.

Recap

Our process



Toolkit resources

- Detailed instructions
- Worksheets
- Examples
- Templates
- Supplemental resources

Midwest Center for School Mental Health

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Guiding values

- Center staff voice and experience
- Address causes, not symptoms
- Attend to context and feasibility
- Design for equity
- Learn through testing and adaptation
- Communicate consistently and openly

Midwest Center for School Mental Health

BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR STAFF WELL-BEING

A Toolkit for Addressing the Root
Causes of School Staff Stress and Burnout



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Common causes of school staff stress



- Workload and time
- Staffing and resources
- Leadership support
- Voice, autonomy and influence
- Collegial relationships and belonging
- Psychological safety
- Student behavior and student-support systems
- Role clarity and competing expectations
- Professional learning and coaching
- Recognition and professional meaning
- Compensation, benefits, & material security
- Equity, discrimination, & inclusion
- Access to mental health support
- Work-life boundaries

What do you think?





Leadership and supervision

Focus areas



**Supportive,
trustworthy, and
responsive
leadership**

STRONG SUPPORT

**Authentic and
meaningful
supervision**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

**Staff voice,
autonomy, and
influence**

STRONG SUPPORT

Supportive leadership



**Supportive,
trustworthy, and
responsive
leadership**

STRONG SUPPORT

What?

- Professional respect
- Clear and honest communication
- Responsiveness to concerns
- Useful feedback
- Protection from harmful working conditions
- Visible engagement and follow-through
- Trust in staff judgment
- Effective problem solving

Supportive leadership



**Supportive,
trustworthy, and
responsive
leadership**

STRONG SUPPORT

Why?

- A significant body of research has demonstrated the strong relationship between leadership traits and teacher well-being and retention
-

Supportive leadership



**Supportive,
trustworthy, and
responsive
leadership**

STRONG SUPPORT

How?

- Define specific/observable leadership practices to strengthen
- Assess strengths and needs
- Provide coaching and mentoring
- Provide opportunities to learn and practice
- Build peer learning into leadership development
- Gather staff feedback and adjust approach
- Examine whether different groups of staff experience leadership support differently

Authentic and meaningful supervision



**Authentic and
meaningful
supervision**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

What?

- Providing ongoing opportunity to discuss performance, professional goals, challenges, resources, workload, stressors, and the support needed to succeed (rather than focusing solely on performance evaluation or compliance)

Authentic and meaningful supervision



**Authentic and
meaningful
supervision**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

Why?

- Mentoring, coaching, feedback, and supportive relationships are associated with staff satisfaction and retention

Authentic and meaningful supervision



**Authentic and
meaningful
supervision**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

How?

- Assess current supervision models
- Use different forms of supervision (such as group or individual approaches) for different purposes
- Make supervision collaborative and individualized
- Align supervision with professional learning and organizational goals

Staff voice, autonomy, and influence



**Staff voice,
autonomy, and
influence**

STRONG SUPPORT

What?

- Staff expertise influences decisions that affects their work
- Staff retain reasonable discretion over how professional work is carried out within shared goals and requirements

Staff voice, autonomy, and influence



**Staff voice,
autonomy, and
influence**

STRONG SUPPORT

Why?

- Research shows strong connections with well-being
- Higher staff autonomy is associated with higher retention, lower work stress, and lower depression

Staff voice, autonomy, and influence



**Staff voice,
autonomy, and
influence**

STRONG SUPPORT

How?

- Reduce unnecessary approval requirements
- Offer choices in professional learning
- When feasible, allow flexibility in when or where work is completed
- Establish staff–administration teams with clearly defined areas of decision authority
- Include people who perform the work when redesigning schedules, documentation, meetings, procedures, technology systems, or other work processes

Staff voice, autonomy, and influence



**Staff voice,
autonomy, and
influence**

STRONG SUPPORT

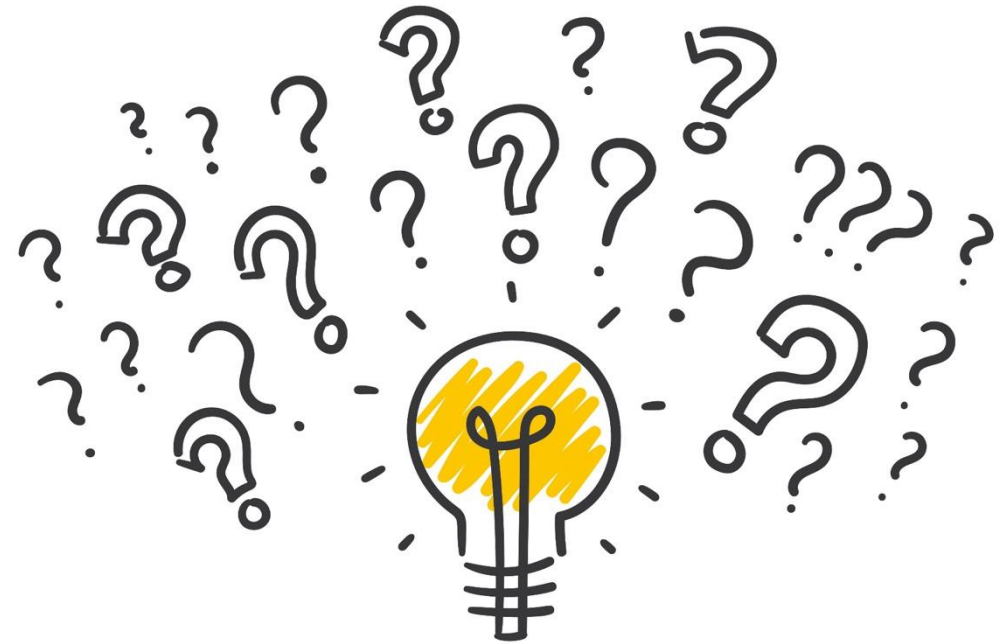
How?

- Seek input early enough that it can actually affect the decision
- Develop compensated teacher-leader, mentor, or peer-coaching roles
- Create structured mechanisms for staff-generated improvement ideas
- involve staff in reviewing the impact of new policies and initiatives after implementation

What do you think?

If you prioritized leadership support, supervision, or staff autonomy

Do any of these strategies feel like they might help?





Workload, staffing, and material supports

Focus areas



**Reduce unnecessary
workload and
administrative
burden**

STRONG SUPPORT

**Protect planning,
collaboration, and
recovery time**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

**Strengthen staffing
and substitute
capacity**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

Workload review



**Reduce unnecessary
workload and
administrative
burden**

STRONG SUPPORT

- Systematically examine what staff are being asked to do and whether each requirement serves a meaningful purpose
- Identify recurring paperwork, documentation, meetings, data entry, assessments, supervision duties, communication expectations, and other activities that consume substantial time
- Involve staff in identifying requirements that are especially burdensome, duplicative, or low-value

Workload review



**Reduce unnecessary
workload and
administrative
burden**

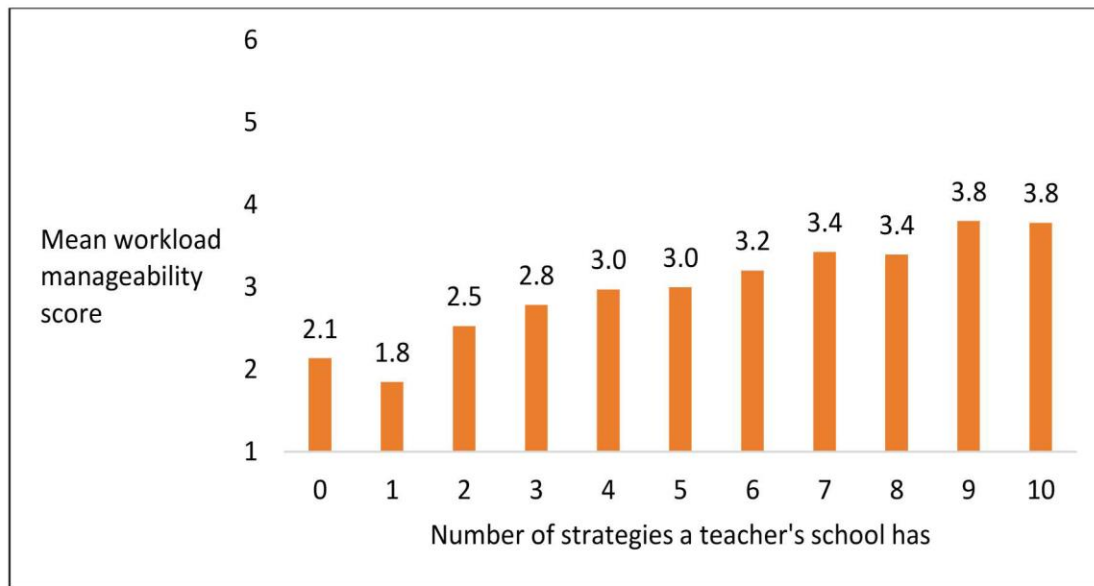
STRONG SUPPORT

The goal should be to **remove, simplify, redesign, or redistribute work**, rather than merely helping employees complete the same volume of work more quickly

Workload reduction initiative (England)

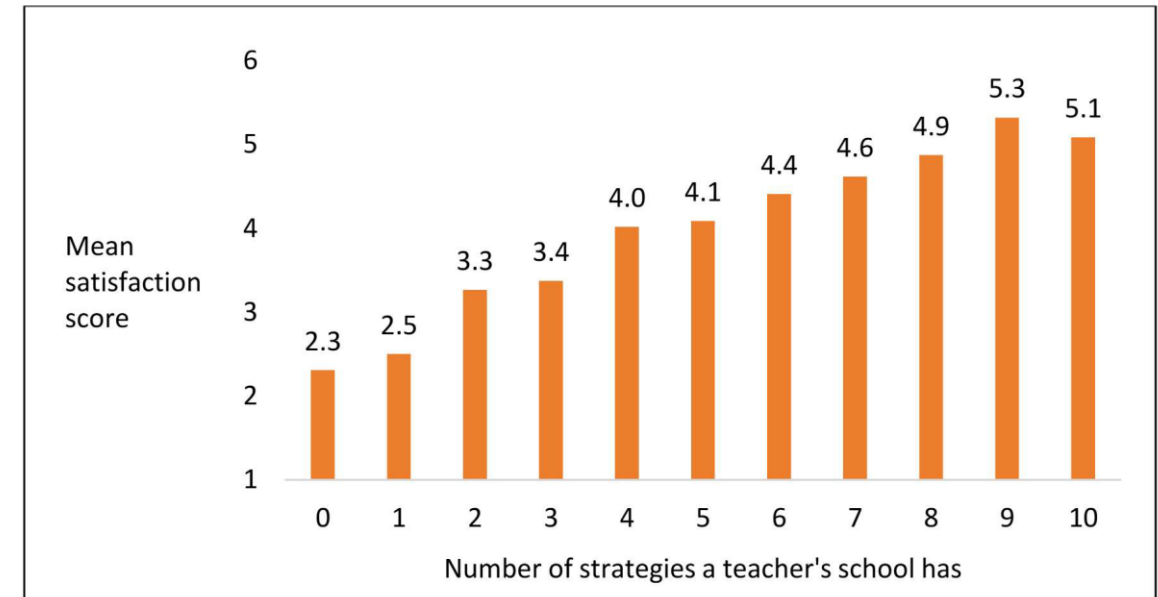
With increasing numbers of workload reduction efforts, teachers reported:

Figure 2: Relationship between the number of strategies in place and the manageability of teachers' workload



Higher ratings of workload
manageability

Figure 3: Relationship between the number of strategies in place and teachers' job satisfaction



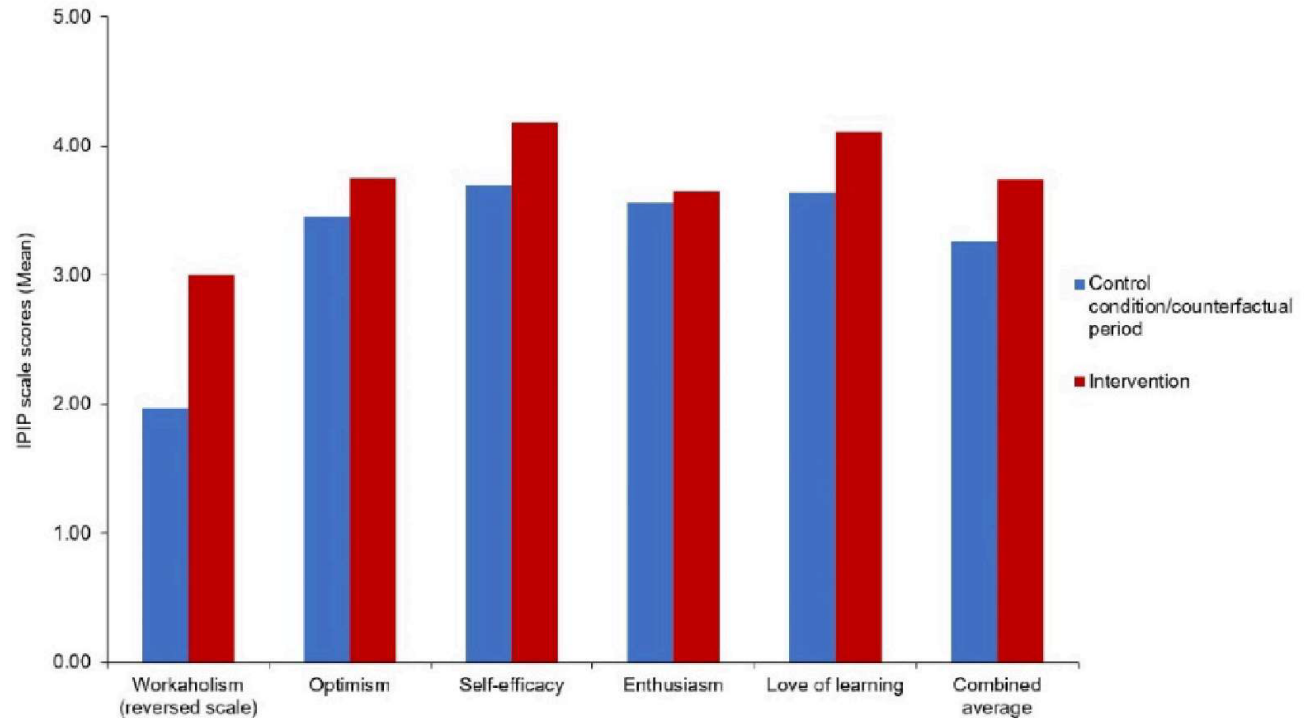
Higher job satisfaction

Workload reduction initiative (England)

Reducing workload led to improved:

- Workaholism
- Optimism
- Self-efficacy
- Enthusiasm
- Love of learning

Teacher wellbeing with and without workload reduction - as measured by five International Personality Item Pool scales



Workload reduction initiative (England)



Most effective strategy
seemed to be grading and
feedback policy

42% said it reduced
workload, compared to
16% who said it increased

Workload reduction initiative (England)



Grading approaches

- Immediate verbal feedback
- Selective written feedback
- Student self- or peer-assessment where appropriate
- Protected time for grading

Other workload reduction strategies to consider



**Reduce unnecessary
workload and
administrative
burden**

STRONG SUPPORT

- Eliminate unnecessary tasks or assignments
- Delay implementation of new curricula/ programs/ initiatives
- Reduce frequency of data collection/ assignments
- Eliminate reports that are not used for decisions
- Reduce duplicative documentation
- Simplify data-entry processes
- Reduce meeting frequency and attendance expectations

Project planning, collaboration, and recovery time strategies



**Protect planning,
collaboration, and
recovery time**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Protect preparation periods from routine coverage assignments
- Build schedule for collaborative planning time
- Provide designated time for documentation and paperwork
- Reserve portions of professional-development days for planning or preparation
- Reduce unnecessary meeting time
- Establish boundaries around work outside the school day

Staffing and substitute capacity strategies



The number of substitutes has decreased by more than 40% over the past decade, with most of that decline occurring since 2019

Staffing and substitute capacity strategies



**Strengthen staffing
and substitute
capacity**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Maintain an ongoing recruitment pipeline
- Target retirees, community members, parents, recent graduates, and others
- Provide orientation, training, and ongoing support
- Create full-time or building-based substitute positions where feasible
- Improve advance notice and scheduling systems
- Coordinate substitute pools across districts

Compensation, benefits, and material security



- Maintain an active substitute recruitment pipeline rather than recruiting only when shortages become acute
- Track where vacancies are producing repeated coverage, overtime, increased caseloads, or lost planning time
- Review compensation and benefits in relation to local labor-market conditions and hard-to-fill roles
- Pair added responsibilities with additional pay, release time, or compensatory time

Broader advocacy efforts may be needed

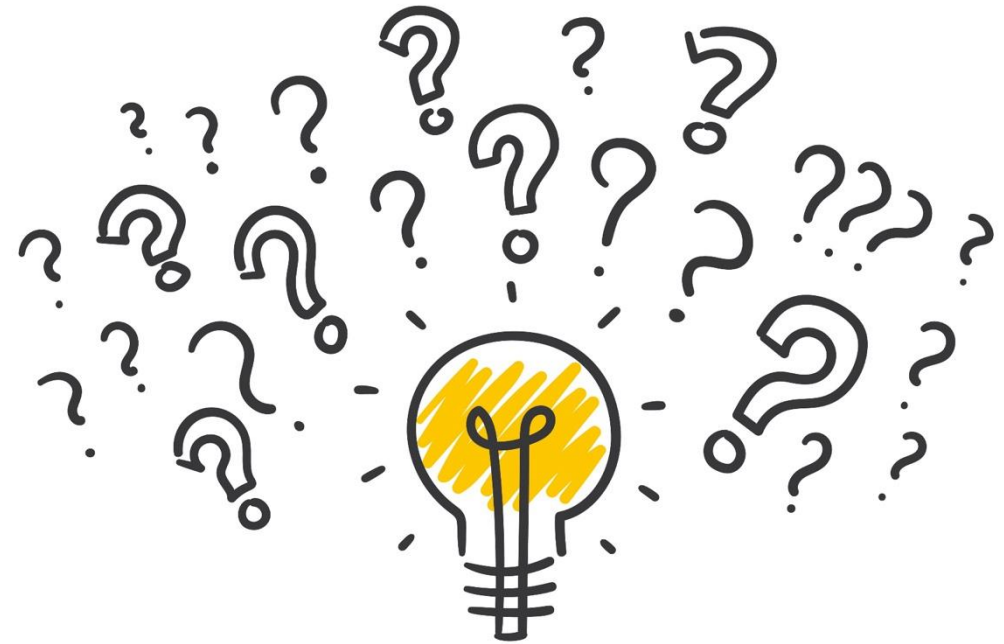


- Salaries
- Service scholarships or loan forgiveness programs
- Career ladder or lattice programs with formal recognition, release time, and salary increases
- Other forms of compensation or benefits, such as childcare, housing assistance or tax incentives
- Grow-your-own pathways and teacher residency programs

What do you think?

If you prioritized workload,
staffing, or material support

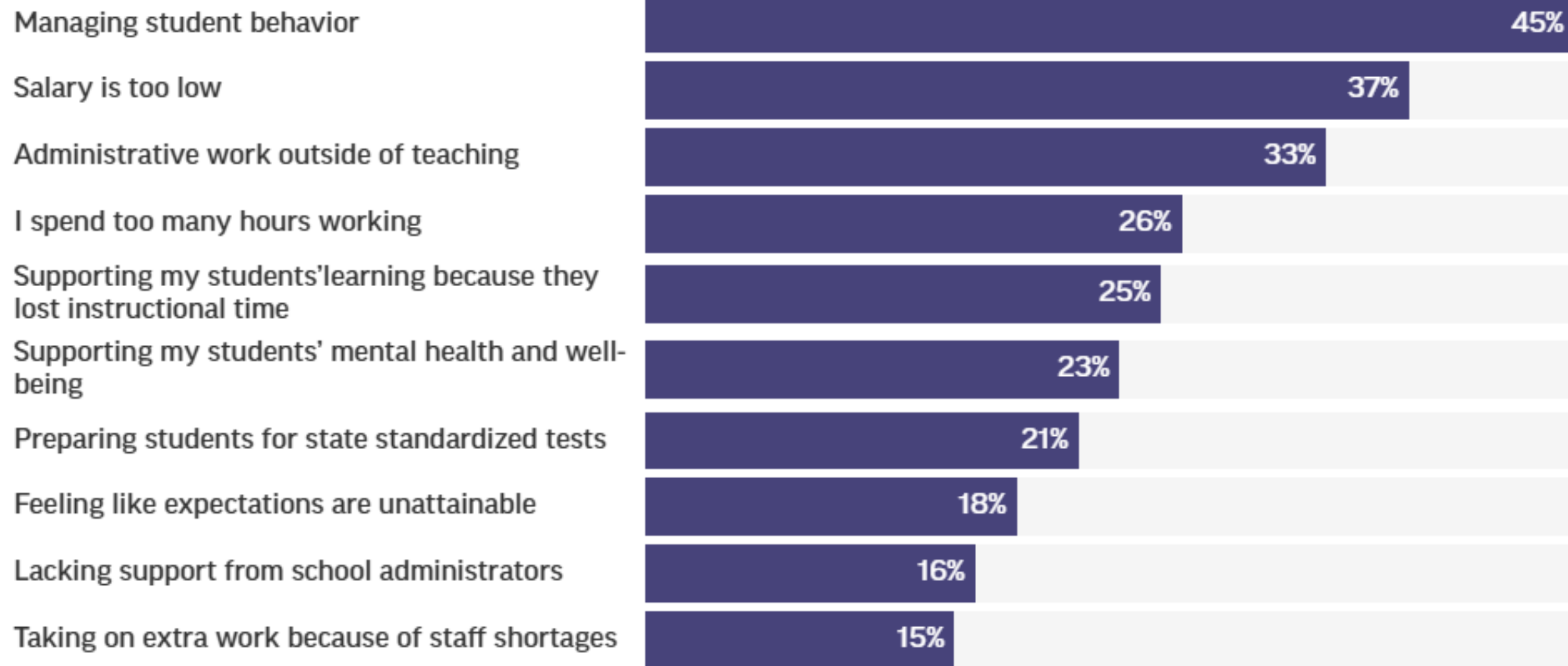
**Do any of these strategies
feel like they might help?**





Student supports **(behavior, mental health, and** **other needs)**

Teachers' Top Sources of Job-Related Stress



(Responses to the question "What are the top three sources of stress in your job right now?")

Source: RAND Corporation, 2024 State of the American Teacher Survey

Focus areas



**Provide accessible
multidisciplinary
student supports**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

**Implement school-
wide behavioral and
social-emotional
support system**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

**Provide responsive
administrative
support for
challenging student
behavior**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

Accessible multidisciplinary student support strategies



**Provide accessible
multidisciplinary
student supports**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Develop teams that bring together expertise in instruction, behavior, mental health, health, special education, and family and community supports
- Establish clear referral and consultation pathways
- Maintain manageable caseloads for specialized staff
- Coordinate supports for students with complex needs
- Establish partnerships with behavioral-health, health, housing, food, and social-service organizations
- Avoid assigning mental-health or behavior responsibilities to educators without time, training or specialist support



1

Teaming

2

Needs assessment & resource mapping

3

Screening

4

Mental health promotion for all (Tier 1)

5

Early intervention & treatment (Tiers 2-3)

6

Funding & sustainability

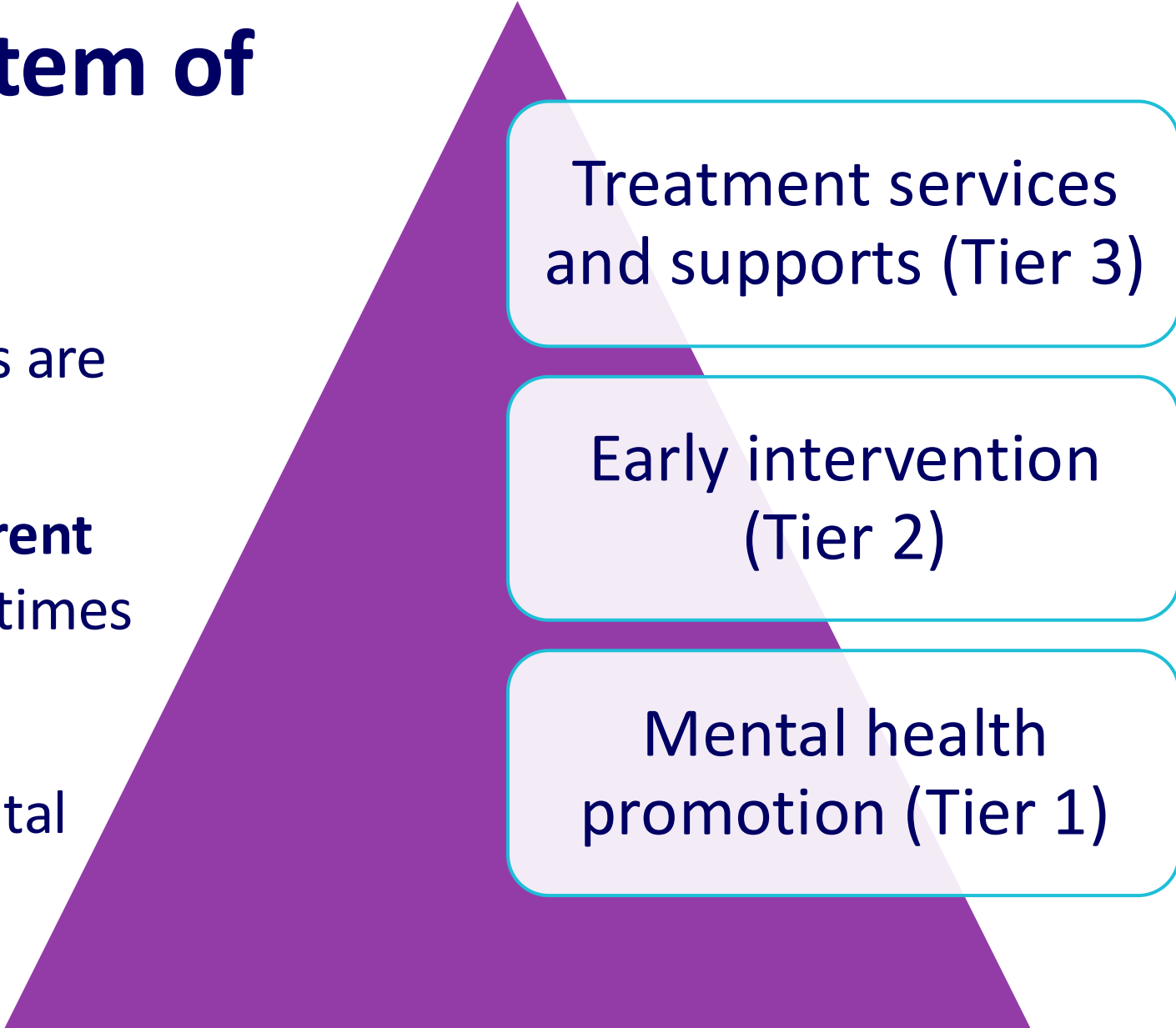
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Impact

**Comprehensive
school mental
health systems**

Multi-tiered system of supports

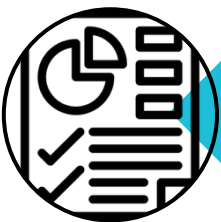
- Needed supports and services are **fluid**
- Students have access to **different levels of support** at different times
- Tiers are **layered**
- There are investments in mental health **promotion**



Treatment services and supports (Tier 3)

Early intervention (Tier 2)

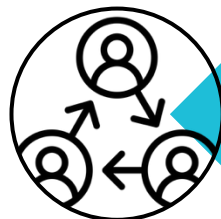
Mental health promotion (Tier 1)



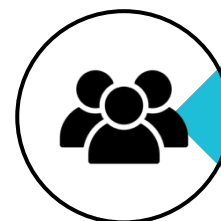
Use the SHAPE system to document current implementation



Identify and prioritize student mental health needs



Map current services and resources



Build or strengthen your school mental health leadership team



Assess school staff readiness to implement services and supports

**5 strategies for
building or
strengthening
comprehensive
school mental
health systems**



**School Health Assessment and
Performance Evaluation System**

www.theshapessystem.com

School-wide student support strategies



Implement school-wide behavioral and social-emotional support system

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Establish a small, clearly defined set of positively stated expectations and routines
- Teach expectations explicitly and provide behavior-specific positive feedback
- Use data to identify settings, routines and groups needing additional support
- Provide tiered behavior and mental-health supports

School-wide student support strategies



Implement school-wide behavioral and social-emotional support system

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Offer coaching for universal practices and individualized behavior-support planning
- Examine discipline data for racial, disability and other inequities
- Use restorative and developmentally responsive approaches rather than relying primarily on punitive exclusion

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)



Implement school-wide behavioral and social-emotional support system

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Framework or approach for helping schools select and organize evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students
- Based on principles of applied behavior analysis and the prevention approach, along with the values of positive behavior support
- The underlying theme is to teach behavioral expectations in the same way as we teach academic subjects

Establish consistent policies



Provide responsive
administrative
support for
challenging student
behavior

EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT

- **Define roles:** Create a "blueprint" that explicitly distinguishes between teacher-managed and office-managed behaviors
- **Standardize routines:** Implement school-wide routines (e.g., hallway transitions, cafeteria flows) to reduce downtime and potential conflict
- **Collaboratively establish code of conduct:** Develop behavior expectations in partnership with teachers to ensure collective buy-in and practical application

Balance student and staff needs

Students

- Accountability
- Learning time
- Engagement
- Safety
- Behavior



Staff

- Support/validation
- Regulation
- Safety

Provide visible and consistent support



**Provide responsive
administrative
support for
challenging student
behavior**

**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

Develop consistent approach that includes:

- Not sending students back to class immediately - provide opportunity for re-regulation
- Following through on consequences – hold students accountable according to school policies
- Never sending students back “empty handed” - Ensure students receive a clear consequence, restorative action, or referral for support
- Closed-loop communication: Always inform teachers of the outcome of an office referral (what was learned, what was done, and why)

Other administrative support strategies



**Provide responsive
administrative
support for
challenging student
behavior**

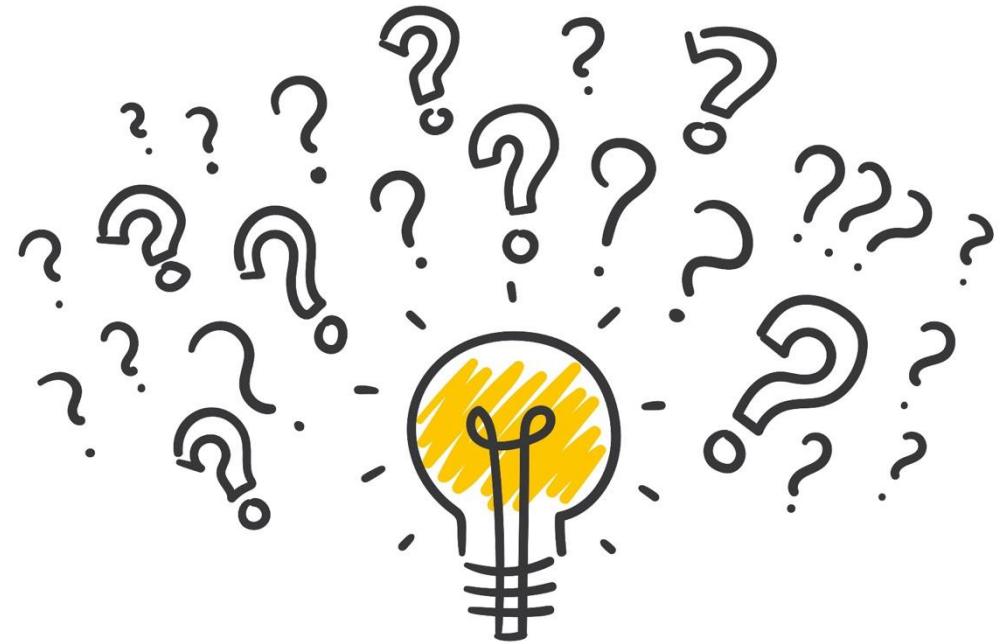
**EMERGING/
PROMISING
SUPPORT**

- Validate and support staff
- Maintain visible presence
- Support parent communication
- Create system for staff to “tap out” during high stress behavioral incidents
- Provide debriefing following high stress situations
- Provide mentorship, professional development, and classroom tools

What do you think?

If you prioritized student supports

Do any of these strategies feel like they might help?





Other priority areas

Other areas included in toolkit



- Culture and collaboration
- Staff recognition and appreciation
- Staff mental health



What comes next?



Next steps



- **September 25: Creating and successfully implementing a plan**
- **Distribution of toolkit**
- **Opportunity to participate in learning/consultation cohort**

What do you think?



What questions do you
have about what we
discussed today?

What do you hope we
address in the next
session?

