

Can Educators Thrive? A Pilot Study of a Multi-Component Educator Well-being Professional Development Intervention

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ABSTRACT

Given growing interest in strategies to support teacher retention and well-being, research has focused on evaluating interventions that both reduce threats to well-being and also develop competencies to increase well-being. The present study focused on a pilot evaluation of the Educators Thriving program, which targeted educator burnout, resilience, and well-being. A quasi-experimental study was performed in which participants who received a multi-component professional development intervention were compared to teachers who did not participate in the program. Relative to educators in a comparison group, findings suggest that educators in the intervention group reported greater improvements in burnout, resilience, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms. These results are promising, suggesting that multi-component professional development interventions may be an effective means to support the well-being and personal development of teachers.

Keywords: burnout, positive psychology, professional development, teacher well-being, resilience

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that teachers face high rates of stress and burnout (Gulgielmi & Tatrow, 1999; Macdonald, 1999), which contribute to high turnover (Sutcher et al., 2016). This has important affective, educational, and financial consequences. Affectively, stress and burnout can contribute to poor mental health outcomes among teachers (Capone & Petrillo, 2020; Rudow, 1999). Regarding educational outcomes, teacher stress and burnout are associated with poorer academic results and emotional development for students (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Herman et al., 2018; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Conversely, higher rates of teacher well-being are associated with stronger teacher-student relationships, improved student well-being, and fewer psychological difficulties among students (Harding et al., 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Financially, teacher stress and burnout are expensive for school districts. Stress and burnout are cited as one of the top reasons why teachers leave the profession, and replacing a single teacher can cost a district over \$20,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016).

With these consequences in mind, there has been a recent surge of interest in teachers' well-being. Several studies have shown that teacher well-being can be improved through targeted interventions (e.g., Cook et al., 2017; Flook et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2013). One approach to improving teacher well-being is via positive psychological interventions. Positive psychological interventions aim to improve positive experiences, cultivate positive traits, and foster positive institutions (Seligman, 2012). Previous systematic reviews and meta-analyses have concluded that positive psychology interventions can enhance well-being, foster resilience, and reduce mental health concerns (Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2020; Meyers et al., 2013; Waters, 2011). Positive psychology interventions also appear to diminish stress and burnout when they are applied in organizational contexts (Meyers et al., 2013). Importantly, evidence suggests that multi-component positive psychology interventions—those that contain a variety of evidence-based exercises within an integral program (Hendriks et al., 2020) — can be especially effective at improving subjective well-being (e.g., Chaves et al., 2017; Seligman et al., 2005). In a systematic review of studies in organizations, Meyers and colleagues (2013) found that positive psychology interventions can improve employee well-being and performance, including in educational contexts (e.g., Chan, 2010 & Grant et al., 2010). There are a wide range of factors that contribute to teacher stress, burnout, and attrition. Examples include systemic factors (e.g., inadequate pay), interpersonal factors (e.g., negative student interactions), and psychological factors (e.g., lack of appropriate coping strategies; Brownell, 1997; Brunsting et al., 2014). Mitigating risk factors is

important, however, it is also important to develop protective factors that can enhance educator well-being (Keyes, 2005; Renshaw & Cohen, 2014).

Given growing interest in strategies to support teacher retention and well-being, research has focused on evaluating interventions that both reduce threats to well-being and also develop competencies to increase well-being (Cook et al., 2017). To date however, most approaches to improving teacher resilience and well-being have focused on single-component strategies such as mindfulness or yoga to mitigate stress (e.g., Beshai et al., 2016; Flook et al., 2013; Frank et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2013). While single-component interventions can be useful, multi-component interventions - those that expose participants to a variety of well-being strategies - may be warranted. Because no single strategy will be helpful for all teachers, multi-component interventions may increase the probability that participants encounter at least one skill that they can apply to experience a higher degree of well-being. For example, an intervention that only offers mindfulness may be well-received by some teachers, but others (e.g., those who are resistant to mindfulness) may not. On the other hand, if a teacher participates in an intervention that includes multiple components, they will more likely learn about and subsequently apply a strategy to increase their well-being.

Two multi-component interventions that have been studied include the Achiever Resilience Curriculum (ARC; Cook et al., 2017) and CALMERRS (Tayler, 2018). The ARC program was based on practices from positive psychology, cognitive behavior therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy. In a randomized block control study, the authors found that teachers who received ARC experienced stress reduction, improvements in self-efficacy, and increased job satisfaction in comparison to the control group (Cook et al., 2017). Similarly, a small pilot program of a multi-component well-being intervention among special education teachers, CALMERSS, found teachers experienced reductions in psychological, personal, and physical strain, reductions in depressive symptoms, and improved self-care (Taylor, 2018). While both studies offer promising results associated with multi-component interventions, sample sizes and participant characteristics (i.e., secondary teachers and special education teachers) were notable limitations. Furthermore, neither intervention was conducted in hybrid virtual format, which could allow the program to more readily scale.

In summary, teachers experience high rates of stress and burnout and there is reason to believe that interventions based on positive psychology principles could be helpful. However, there has been limited attention given to multi-component positive psychology interventions specifically for teachers. With this in mind, efforts to develop and evaluate novel positive psychology interventions for teachers are warranted.

In this paper, the authors will describe the development and pilot evaluation of a positive psychology intervention for teachers: Educators Thriving. The intervention was designed to target positive personal resources (e.g., identifying signature strengths) and teach strategies to promote well-being (e.g., reflecting on core values) that could help foster educator well-being and reduce stress and burnout. The program was designed to be evidence-based, ecologically valid (i.e., relevant in real-world contexts), and scalable. To ensure that the intervention was based on a solid tradition of research, sessions were grounded in empirically supported positive psychology interventions and the science of behavior change (Chaves et al., 2017; Kegan et al., 2009; Seligman et al., 2005; Seligman, 2012). To increase the ecological validity of the program, and in light of research on the benefits of involving staff in the development of programming (Saaranen et al., 2013), Educators Thriving performed interviews with educators and school administrators, involved educators in the design of the intervention, and focused the intervention on common challenges that educators experience (see author, 2020; Knowles, 1970; Moir, 1990). Finally, to improve the scalability of the intervention, the researchers designed the intervention with the following features: (a) an online delivery format (such that intervention content could be scaled to anyone with internet access), (b) a group-based delivery format (such that multiple people could engage in content simultaneously and discuss their application of the strategies), and (c) content that is accessible asynchronously (such that teachers had flexibility in terms of when they can engage with the program content). Evidence-based teacher well-being programs have predominantly been in-person and synchronous (e.g., Cook et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2013), possibly limiting overall participation, particularly among teachers who may need more flexible schedules. Providing content online, while still creating opportunities for group collaboration, could potentially improve the reach and feasibility of well-being interventions.

The present study focuses on a pilot evaluation of the Educators Thriving program, which targeted educator burnout, resilience, and well-being. A quasi-experimental study was performed in which participants who received *Educators Thriving* were compared to teachers who did not participate in the program. Teacher well-being can be conceptualized from multiple perspectives (Hascher & Weber, 2021). For the purpose of this program and evaluation, well-being can be characterized as a subjective, multi-component construct including both positive (e.g., happiness) and negative (e.g., burnout) dimensions - with a balance towards positive constructs. Because this program did not target environmental aspects associated with teaching (e.g., working conditions), the intervention focused on individual, psychological well-being and resilience.

With this in mind, the present study focuses on this research question: Compared to teachers in the comparison group, did teachers in the intervention condition experience greater improvements in resilience, burnout, stress, well-being, and depressive symptoms?

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

Teachers were recruited from three public school districts and one county office of education in the United States. Two districts were categorized as urban, one district was categorized as rural, and the county office of education was categorized as suburban and rural. Districts were identified via personal and professional connections with Educators Thriving. All teachers in the partner districts were invited to participate in the Educators Thriving program. In the county office of education, all participants in the teacher induction program were offered the opportunity to participate. Participants were offered the program for free because partner districts covered the costs associated with Educators Thriving except in the case of one district where participants paid a small contribution to participate (the local teachers union covered a majority of the remaining costs).

Treatment Group

County, district, and school-based administrators emailed a flier describing the program to prospective participants and encouraged them to apply to the program. School principals and induction program leaders also shared a video with teachers during the beginning of year professional development sessions describing the program and study. Interested educators completed a short survey in which they provided their email addresses and answered a few brief questions regarding their interest in the program. Of the 208 educators across four districts who started the program, 131 completed the program (63% overall program retention). There were no noticeable demographic differences between completers and non-completers. Of note, a majority of non-completers “dropped out” after the first three of twelve sessions due to lack of time or personal reasons (e.g., illness).

Comparison Group

In partnership with the county office of education, all teachers in the teacher induction program, including those who did not choose to participate in the Educators Thriving program, participated in beginning and end-of-year survey data collection. Teachers were emailed a link to the survey from induction program leaders and given time to complete the survey during induction professional development sessions. A total of 512 educators completed surveys at time 1 and time 2 (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Information

	Treatment	Comparison
N	131	512
Sex		
Male	13, 9%	123, 24%
Female	118, 90%	373, 73%
Missing	0	16, 3%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	62, 47%	280, 55%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1, <1%	0, 0%
Asian	15, 11%	15, 3%
Hispanic/Latinx/ Spanish origin	20, 15%	125, 24%
Black	7, 5%	9, 2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1, <1%	4, <1%
Multiple Races	16, 12%	45, 9%
Other	0, 0%	11, 2%
Missing	8, 6%	25, 5%
Age		
Average	37.45	38.24
20s	40, 30%	137
30s	39, 30%	168
40s	28, 21%	96
50s	16, 12%	78
60s	4, 3%	20
Missing	4, 3%	13

Sample Size Determination

In a recent meta-analysis of positive psychology interventions, the authors found that effect sizes ranged from 0.39 to 0.62 on a variety of well-being-related outcomes (Carr et al., 2020). Thus, our study was powered to detect a between-group effect size of $d=0.4$. An a priori power analysis revealed that the study would require 211 participants (105.5 per group) to detect a between-group effect size of $d = 0.4$ (at an alpha level of 0.05 and a power of 0.8).

Procedure

Participants in both the treatment and control group completed an online survey of baseline measures. Participants in the treatment group engaged in Educators Thriving content; participants in the comparison group received no Educators Thriving programming but did receive standard induction mentoring support. At the end of the school year, all participants received a follow-up survey link containing the same survey items as those measured at baseline. Study procedures were reviewed and approved by a university Institutional Review Board.

Intervention Condition (Description of Educators Thriving)

Teachers in the treatment group who participated in Educators Thriving attended a total of 12 sessions to learn about and practice evidence-based strategies to increase well-being. Topics included reflecting on common challenges facing educators, identifying and reflecting on their core values, articulating their goals, reflecting on and improving the strength of their relationships, practicing mindfulness, and identifying and using their signature strengths in new ways (see Table 2 for a description of each session).

Each educator in the intervention group was assigned to a small group of approximately 4-6 educators with whom they would engage in the sessions. Participants shared if they would prefer to meet in identity (e.g., race/ethnicity), tenure, or role-alike groups or if they had no preference. Educators Thriving placed people accordingly.

Groups met approximately every two to three weeks via a video conferencing platform. Each session was housed on a webpage unique to that session. The webpage typically contained between 4 and 6 different videos to guide participants through the various components of the session. One member of the group would share their screen, and participants would watch the videos and then engage with the prompts as directed. The sessions followed a consistent pattern: Each of them began with an opportunity for participants to check in with one another. Next, participants reviewed the ways in which they'd applied the content from the previous session. After that, participants learned about the focus strategy for the day (e.g. core values, mindfulness) and had an initial opportunity to apply the content (e.g. identify their core values, practice with mindfulness meditation). Following each session, participants were expected to complete homework assignments in which they would apply the strategies they had learned about in the previous session and produce some documentation demonstrating or reflecting on their application of the strategies. Additionally, participants completed a final project synthesizing their reflections about the program. Sessions lasted between one and a half and two hours.

Table 2*Professional Development Sessions*

Session Topic	Description of Professional Development Session
Common pitfalls	Participants learned about “Five Pitfalls” (Author, 2020) associated with educator burnout (Moir, 1990; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The pitfalls include overwhelm, personal neglect, fixed mindset, unexpected challenges, and isolation. Educators also practiced with active listening strategies (Keaton, 2017) to better understand the experience of their fellow group members with respect to the five pitfalls.
Prioritization	Participants learned techniques to help them prioritize tasks according to their level of urgency and importance (Covey, 1989) and practiced techniques designed to help them implement desired behaviors (Milne et al., 2002). Following the session, participants were expected to be deliberate about engaging in important, non-urgent activities (e.g., sleeping more, exercising, spending time with friends) for 30 minutes per day.
Core Values	Participants identified and reflected on their core values (Brady et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2015). They also completed a value affirmation exercise and were encouraged to reflect daily on how their core values influenced their daily behaviors and responses to stressful situations.
Purpose, Vision, and Goals	Participants learned about the health benefits of writing about life goals (King, 2001) and having a sense of purpose (Ishida & Okada, 2006; Sone et al., 2008). Participants reflected on their purpose, vision, and goals for their classroom as well as goals in their personal lives. Following the session, participants were expected to articulate their goals in writing.
Relationships	Participants learned about the impact of loneliness on overall well-being and the importance of social connections and social support (Baumeister et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2001; House et al., 1988; McPherson et al., 2006; Schnall et al., 2008). Participants reflected on ways they could strengthen existing relationships and seek social support.
Mindfulness	Over the course of two sessions, participants learned about the health and wellness benefits of mindfulness (Flook et al., 2013; Haidt, 2006; McGonigal, 2006).

Participants completed mindfulness meditation exercises, and they were encouraged to practice mindfulness for 15 minutes each day following the session and record their observations.

Adult
Development

Over the course of three sessions, participants were introduced to constructive development theory and the immunity to change framework (Kegan, 1980; Kegan et al., 2009). Participants reflected on a personal or professional area they would like to change and mapped current barriers to change as well as underlying motives driving their non-desired behaviors. Subsequently, they engaged in the new, desired behavior and reflected on their experience having done so.

Strengths

Participants completed a questionnaire designed to help them identify and reflect on their signature strengths (VIA Institute on Character). Then, they brainstormed ways they could apply their personal strengths to navigate challenges and improve their well-being (Park et al., 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Proyer et al., 2015; Duckworth et al., 2005). Following the session, participants incorporated at least one of their newly-identified strengths into their lives each day for one week.

Each group was assigned a program assistant. Program assistants were selected via a rigorous application process. Previous program participants were invited to apply to the program assistant role by submitting an application video introducing themselves, sharing why they wanted this role, and how they might handle various scenarios with participants. Of the 113 individuals who applied, 42 were selected for the program assistant position. Program assistants received 4 hours of training over the course of three training sessions. Program assistants reviewed core content, provided feedback on participant's homework submissions, answered participant questions as needed, and monitored participation and attendance. They were paid a stipend (\$35 per hour).

Participants who completed all twelve sessions and assignments were offered the opportunity to purchase continued education units (CEUs) through a university. Requirements and price varied by district based on criteria for professional learning.

Measures

A variety of measures, including indicators of burnout, well-being, and resilience, were used to evaluate program impact.

Burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI-E; Maslach, 1986), a widely used measure of burnout, includes three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. This 22-item scale asks educators to assess how they view their job and reactions to their work on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*everyday*). Sample items include: “I don’t really care what happens to some students” (depersonalization) and “I feel emotionally drained from my work” (emotional exhaustion). Meta-analysis of the original MBI has demonstrated support for a 3-factor scale and reliability analyses indicate strong internal consistency within each factor (Worley et al., 2008). Estimates of internal consistency in the current study were acceptable (personal accomplishment subscale $\alpha = 0.85$; emotional exhaustion subscale $\alpha = 0.90$; depersonalization subscale $\alpha = 0.78$).

Well-being

Two indicators of well-being were compared over time: mental health (PHQ-9) and subjective happiness.

Mental Health. The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9; Kroenke et al., 2001) is a 9-item scale (Kroenke et al., 2001). Participants self-report depressive symptoms on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 3 (*nearly every day*). Sample items include: “little interest and pleasure in doing things” and “poor appetite or overeating.” Previous studies have found solid psychometric properties (Kroenke et al., 2001) and the present study had an acceptable alpha ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Happiness. The subjective happiness scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999) is a 4-item scale of global subjective happiness. Respondents are asked to characterize themselves relative to peers and use absolute ratings on a scale from 1 to 7. One item is reverse coded and scores are calculated by computing the mean across responses to all questions. The SHS has been validated among diverse populations of adults in numerous studies and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties. In the present study, estimates of internal consistency were acceptable ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Resilience

The CD-RISC 10 was used to measure teacher resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This 10-item unidimensional scale is an abbreviated version

of the full self-report 25-item CD-RISC. Respondents rate items on a scale from 0 (*not true at all*) to 4 (*true all the time*). Sample survey items include: “I am able to adapt when change occurs.” Total scores are calculated by summing all 10 items with summative scores ranging between 0-40; higher scores indicate higher levels of self-reported resilience. Previous studies have demonstrated sound psychometric properties among diverse populations (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Notario-Pacheco, et al. 2011; Wang et al., 2010). In the present study, estimates of internal consistency were acceptable ($\alpha = 0.9$).

Job Satisfaction Item (single)

Using a single item, participants were asked the extent to which they were satisfied with their job: “Taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about your job as a whole?.” Researchers chose to use a single-item measure rather than multiple items and facets of job satisfaction to gauge participants' global satisfaction with their work. Responses were on a scale from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 9 (*extremely satisfied*). Studies of single-item job satisfaction measures have found scores to be highly correlated with multiple-item measures of overall job satisfaction and a single-item version and multiple-item version of the Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS; Wart et al., 1979) have demonstrated similar levels of convergent and discriminant validity with relevant measures (e.g., coworker support and work stress; Dolbier et al., 2005; Ock, 2020).

Acceptability of Intervention Measure

The Acceptability of Intervention Measure (AIM) asks respondents to rate the degree to which they liked or approved of an intervention. Participants responded to four AIM items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The ratings across the four items are averaged to yield an acceptability score (Weiner et al., 2017). In the present study, estimates of internal consistency were acceptable ($\alpha = 0.86$). Consistent with previous literature (e.g., Wasil et al., 2021), average scores >3 were operationalized to indicate that participants endorsed the acceptability of the intervention.

Analytic Plan

Researchers conducted hierarchical linear models (HLMs) to assess changes in each outcome measure. The model included time, condition, the interaction term time*condition, and a random intercept to account for repeated measurements. A statistically significant ($p < .05$) effect in the hypothesized direction would indicate that the participants in the intervention

group reported greater improvements than participants in the comparison group.

For time*condition effects that were statistically significant or approached statistical significance, we calculated effect sizes. Calculated standardized mean differences (Cohen's d) using mean gain scores were calculated. These effect sizes represent changes on each outcome measure from baseline (beginning of the school year) to post-intervention (end of the school year).

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The final sample consisted of 131 individuals in the intervention group and 512 individuals in the comparison group (see Table 1 for sample demographics).

At baseline, participants in the intervention group generally reported lower levels of well-being and greater levels of concerns than participants in the comparison group. Participants in the intervention group reported higher baseline levels of emotional exhaustion ($p < 0.001$, $d = 0.63$), depersonalization ($p = 0.001$, $d = 0.39$), depressive symptoms ($p < 0.001$, $d = 0.38$) and anxiety symptoms ($p < 0.001$, $d = 0.41$). Participants in the intervention group also reported lower baseline levels of personal accomplishment ($p < 0.001$, $d = -0.65$), resilience ($p < 0.001$, $d = -0.72$), and subjective happiness ($p < 0.001$, $d = -0.44$). To account for these baseline differences, researchers calculated effect sizes using mean change scores, rather than post-treatment scores, since post-treatment scores are more likely to be misleading in the presence of pre-treatment differences.

Burnout

Participants in the intervention group reported greater improvements in burnout than participants in the comparison group. Specifically, participants in the intervention group reported greater improvements in the personal accomplishment subscale ($p < 0.001$) and the emotional exhaustion subscale ($p < 0.001$) of the MBI. The effect sizes (standardized mean differences comparing mean gain scores between the two groups) were $d = 0.47$ (95% CI : [0.026, 0.67]) for the personal accomplishment subscale and $d = 0.26$ (95% CI : [0.08, 0.44]) for the emotional exhaustion subscale. There was not a significant difference in changes on the depersonalization subscale of the MBI ($p = 0.54$).

Resilience

Participants in the intervention group reported greater improvements in resilience than participants in the comparison group ($p < 0.001$). The effect size of the difference in mean gain scores was $d = 0.49$ (95% *CI*: [0.31, 0.67]).

Depressive Symptoms

Participants in the intervention group reported greater reductions in depressive symptoms than participants in the comparison group ($p < 0.001$). The effect size of the difference in mean gain scores was $d = 0.34$ (95% *CI*: [0.16, 0.52]).

Anxiety Symptoms

Participants in the intervention group reported greater reductions in anxiety symptoms than participants in the comparison group ($p = 0.002$). The effect size of the difference in mean gain scores was $d = 0.26$ (95% *CI*: [0.08, 0.43]).

Happiness

Participants in the intervention group reported slightly greater improvements in subjective happiness than participants in the comparison group, though this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.11$). The effect size of the difference in mean gain scores was $d = 0.11$ (95% *CI*: [-0.01, 0.22]).

Job Satisfaction

Participants in the intervention and comparison groups both reported slight improvements in job satisfaction, though the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.087$).

Acceptability

Participants reported high rates of acceptability on the AIM ($Mean = 4.38$, $SD = 0.68$). Applying a cutoff of 3 (such that scores >3 indicate that participants endorse the acceptability of the intervention), 94% of participants rated the intervention as acceptable. Acceptability ratings were not associated with gender ($p = 0.23$) or race ($p = 0.43$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, a pilot evaluation of Educators Thriving, a multi-component intervention to promote educator well-being, was performed. Relative to educators in a comparison group, results indicated that educators in the intervention group reported greater improvements in burnout, resilience, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, educators

provided high ratings of the intervention's acceptability, indicating that they liked, enjoyed, and appreciated the intervention. These results are promising, suggesting that Educators Thriving may be an effective means by which to support the well-being and personal development of teachers. To date, there are few evidence-based interventions specifically designed for educators. Given these pilot findings, future work to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (e.g., a wait-list control design or well-powered randomized controlled trials) are warranted.

Several characteristics of Educators Thriving are worth commenting on. First, as emphasized earlier, the program included multiple well-being strategies to maximize the chance that a given participant would encounter a strategy that would be helpful. As compared to single-component interventions (e.g., yoga for educators), a multi-component program may have additional benefits. Second, the program had a flexible participation structure. Although teachers were required to show up to their groups synchronously, each group could identify a time that worked best for the various group members. This allowed teachers to participate from a convenient location and limited possible stress associated with commuting to on-site professional development. Moreover, the online delivery format involving content that is continually accessible suggests the program may be easier to scale than in-person interventions. Scalability of programming may also facilitate access to well-being related content for educators and future research.

Third, stakeholder involvement was especially important for the implementation of Educators Thriving. To implement the program, Educators Thriving partnered with three districts and one county office of education and engaged multiple stakeholders including superintendents, union leaders, induction program coordinators, and school principals. District and school leaders played a critical role in recruitment and program structure. Districts financially supported teacher participation, identified opportunities for recruitment, helped design program scheduling, and provided ongoing feedback related to implementation. District and school-based leaders should consider ways to make well-being programs accessible and feasible for participants. This can assure that well-being is seen as a mutual priority, rather than something that educators must pursue independently.

Fourth, Educators Thriving was delivered in *groups*, allowing individuals to learn alongside a community of educators, share best practices, and troubleshoot challenges. A relational format is distinct from other, online, self-paced professional development or self-help courses, and may be a key component of Educators Thriving impact. Collaboration is a central component of effective adult learning experiences as it encourages co-construction of meaning and mutual relationships through a shared enterprise

(Knowles, 1970; Wegner, 1998). Accordingly, collaborative practices further opportunities for teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they may reflectively share their practice, revisit beliefs on teaching and learning, and co-construct knowledge (Achinstein, 2002).

Finally, Educators Thriving considered ways to provide meaningful incentives to program participants. Some teachers may have been interested in well-being development for the sake of personal growth, but others may have been incentivized because they had the opportunity to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs). In some districts, CEUs translated directly to a step up on the pay scale or were required for ongoing certification. Districts should consider meaningful incentives to encourage participation and signal their shared interest in promoting well-being.

While the findings relating to outcome measures and acceptability were promising, there were also some important limitations of the program. For example, about one-fifth of program participants no longer continued the program after the first three sessions, and about one-tenth of participants discontinued between session 3 and session 6. Future evaluations of Educators Thriving, as well as other educator well-being programs, could examine reasons why participants discontinue personal development programs. Investment in personal well-being development experiences takes time, and a question facing the field is whether teachers can derive the same benefit from programming that is shorter in duration. Commitment to a yearlong learning experience is significant and identifying ways to increase program retention is a challenge facing Educators Thriving specifically and well-being programming in general. Thus, future work could examine shorter versions of Educators Thriving to determine if this increases program retention and consider ways to further incent participants to remain in the program. Such work could draw from literature on the essential components of well-being interventions (Wolpert et al., 2021), as well as common elements in empirically supported interventions (Chorpita & Daleiden, 2009).

Limitations

The evaluation of Educators Thriving has several limitations. First, the pilot evaluation was not a randomized trial, limiting our ability to draw causal inferences. Although randomized trials are necessary to draw causal inferences, non-randomized trials are often more feasible to conduct, provide preliminary acceptability and efficacy estimates that can inform further randomized controlled trials, and generate useful approximations of an intervention's effectiveness (see Reeves et al., 2008). With this in mind, future research could evaluate this program via well-powered randomized trials.

Second, there were limitations associated with the comparison group. Teachers in the comparison group were recruited from one of the four partner

school districts/county offices of education. Each member of the comparison group was a participant in that partner’s induction programming. Although the average age of comparison and treatment group teachers was similar, there may be other characteristic differences between teachers in induction programs and those not in induction programs. Of note, intervention participants also reported statistically significantly higher baseline levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms. Intervention participants also reported lower baseline levels of personal accomplishment, resilience, and subjective happiness. As these individuals at baseline had lower levels of overall well-being, they may have been more likely to respond to the intervention than individuals with higher baseline levels of well-being.

Third, a substantial percentage (43%) of initial participants in the treatment group “dropped out” of the Educators Thriving program. Those that left the program may have also been characteristically different from those who completed the program. Retention over a year-long program, particularly during a global pandemic in which educators have reported particularly high levels of stress (Kraft et al., 2020; Steiner & Woo, 2021), is a significant challenge facing teacher professional development in general and may also pose specific challenges to professional development experiences designed to improve well-being.

Additionally, measures of teacher retention were self-reported “retention intentions” rather than objective retention data. Data sharing agreements with districts were strictly limited to teacher self-report surveys. Future studies may want to consider ways to track teacher retention over time.

Finally, one author of this paper developed and designed Educators Thriving programming and, to some extent, the research design of this study. To minimize potential bias, the research and evaluation associated with this study was led by the paper’s other two authors who identified survey measures and conducted data analysis.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Preliminary findings of this pilot study were promising and suggest the need for additional research associated with teacher well-being professional development. Future studies should consider randomized control trials and the inclusion of larger and more diverse samples of teachers to evaluate broader program impact given the potential selection biases associated with this study. Future research may also want to explore the relationship between program participation and actual teacher retention data to determine if well-being supports can lengthen the duration of a teacher’s tenure in the profession.

Additionally, in light of the growing interest and need for supporting teacher well-being, future research should consider evaluating other well-

being interventions to identify a number of ways in which the sector may improve well-being. For example, there are a number of other educator-specific intervention programs that have emerged over the past decade (e.g., Breathe for Change, EdWell, etc.), that provide other kinds of support to educators such as yoga or one-on-one well-being coaching.

There is also great interest in the relationship between teacher well-being and student well-being. One underlying assumption driving this work is that teacher well-being and retention are associated with positive student outcomes. While some evidence suggests this to be true (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Herman et al., 2018), future evaluations of teacher well-being programs may want to consider collecting student outcome data as well (e.g., student well-being and student academic growth).

Finally, this study was quantitative in nature, but the collection of qualitative data may strengthen our understanding of program feasibility and its impact on participants. Qualitative studies may explore how teachers interpret and apply well-being programming and help identify possible ecological barriers to more widespread implementation of programs like Educators Thriving.

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that Educators Thriving may be beneficial in improving teacher well-being, as participants in the program reported improvements on measures of well-being, burnout, resilience, and mental health. The researchers hope that this work inspires the development and evaluation of additional programs to support educators in the United States and elsewhere. Additional work is needed to understand which programs are most effective, how they can be implemented successfully, and how these programs affect both teacher outcomes and student outcomes. Such work has the potential to support the well-being of teachers, improve student outcomes, reduce expenditures related to retention and burnout.

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