



Strategic Briefing Report Student and Staff Well-being

August 2019



STRATEGIC BRIEFING REPORT

STUDENT AND STAFF WELL-BEING

OVERVIEW

Rationale: Put People First

Research shows that a person’s well-being involves intellectual, social and emotional development that includes a strong sense of belonging, hope, resilience and the ability to see stress as a challenge instead of a threat. Student and staff wellbeing are essential to academic success.

Upper Arlington Schools embarked on a holistic inquiry process into the current and desired states of student and staff well-being. Learnings from this process are intended to inform the development of the strategic plan, educate the leadership and school community and unify efforts to provide a safe, connected, and healthy learning environment and workplace for the students and staff of the Upper Arlington Schools. The goal of prioritizing student and staff well-being in the new strategic plan is for all students and staff to benefit from an educational culture that fosters safety through belonging and balance.

Although a variety of efforts to address well-being have been put into place over the past several years in the Upper Arlington Schools, the leadership of the district believes that it is not enough. There is more that can and needs to be done. Since well-being as a focus area in education is a fairly new priority and each community has its own culture, challenges and opportunities, time and resources have been dedicated to learning more about well-being in the UA Schools so that critical decisions can be made to advance and unify efforts to be both proactive and responsive in this area.

A report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) emphasizes the need for schools in the 21st Century “to prepare students for an interconnected world in which students understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being” (Schleicher, 2018, p. 29). In order for students to be successful in an interconnected world, social and emotional skills are necessary. Joseph A. Durlak and colleagues (2011) reviewed 213 studies of school-based social and emotional learning programs. Their research shows that social-emotional learning not only improves student achievement by an average of 11 percentile points but also increases prosocial behaviors (kindness, empathy, sharing), reduces depression and stress among students and improves student attitudes toward school.

The past educational system was about “received wisdom” while the future educational system is about “user-generated wisdom” (Schleicher, 2018, p. 33). Psychological and physical safety are precursors to



creating a learning environment where all perspectives are honored, and individuals are seen as equal participants in the co-creation of wisdom. To make this difficult yet important shift, Upper Arlington Schools is committed to prioritizing staff and student well-being in the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.

APPROACH

The well-being inquiry process was designed to maximize both learning and curiosity since the topic being studied is ambiguous and complex. In addition to representing their own stakeholder perspective, the individuals involved in this process were both learners and researchers. The essential question, constructs and guiding questions that were used to frame the inquiry process are defined here.

Essential Question: *What must the Upper Arlington City Schools do to advance student and staff safety through well-being?*

The construct 'well-being' was framed by these two community priority areas – belonging and balance. As a starting point, these descriptions of constructs were used to launch the inquiry process:

- Belonging – positive and healthy relationships between and among students, staff, and peers.
- Balance – safe, supportive, meaningful, and healthy learning and work environment.

Guiding Questions

1. What are our **operational definitions** of belonging and balance?
2. What are the **current states** of student and staff belonging and student and staff school-life balance? What philosophies, policies and practices currently influence these areas?
3. What does the current **research and literature** tell us about strategies and best practices for belonging and school-life balance?
4. What are the **conditions and principles** that support and shape a strong sense of belonging and school-life balance?
5. What are the **desired states** (vision) for student and staff belonging and student and staff school-life balance in UA Schools? What does it look like, sound like and feel like?
6. How will we know when we have achieved our desired states? What are the indicators, and how will/can they be **monitored and measured**?
7. What are our evidence-based **theories of action**? What should we **stop, start and strengthen** to ensure our students and staff experience a strong sense of belonging and school-life balance?

LEADERSHIP

The topic of well-being in the UA Schools was of such importance to so many stakeholders that forming a singular inquiry team of an appropriate size was impossible. To engage as many stakeholders as possible in the inquiry process, a tiered approach to the creation of the inquiry team was used. First, an inquiry leadership team was created consisting of a community member, Dr. John Ackerman, who is deeply involved in both research and clinical practice in the field of well-being at Nationwide Children's Hospital; Dr. Jaclyn Angle, Associate Director of Student Services, Upper Arlington Schools; Dr. Andy Hatton, Director of Academic Affairs, Upper Arlington Schools; and facilitated by Dr. Denise Snowden, the Ohio State University.



Two additional teams were formed to maximize engagement in the inquiry process. The Well-being Inquiry Team was composed of 19 individuals - community members, parents, students, and school staff (teachers, counselors, administrators). The purpose of the Inquiry Team was to provide feedback on the development of the inquiry process, support the implementation of the inquiry process, and serve as ambassadors (internal and external). Another team, the Advisory Team, consisting of an additional 32 members was formed to serve primarily in an advisory capacity and provide ongoing feedback to the Inquiry Team for a broader stakeholder perspective and quality control (critical friendship).

From January through May 2019, the Well-being Leadership Team met weekly and the Inquiry and Advisory Teams met monthly. The Inquiry and Advisory Teams met jointly to initiate the process and again at the conclusion to finalize recommendations. Periodically, a joint subgroup of these teams would assemble to make decisions as well.

Advisory Team	Inquiry Team	Leadership Team
<p>Who: Interested and invested stakeholders Role: Provide insight, perspective and critical friendship throughout the process.</p> <p>When: Feb. 4 (launch); Virtual meetings Feb. 27, Mar. 27, May 13</p>	<p>Who: A subgroup of the Advisory Team Role: Provide feedback on the development of the inquiry process, support the implementation of the inquiry process and serve as ambassadors.</p> <p>When: Feb 4 (launch); Face-to-Face meetings Feb. 25, Mar. 25, Apr. 15, May 13</p>	<p>Who: A subgroup of the Inquiry Team Role: Manage and facilitate the inquiry process, coordinate with the Strategic Coordination Group and district officials, and provide transparency of process implementation.</p> <p>When: as needed (at least twice a month)</p>

PROCESS AND TIMELINE

A project charter was developed that outlined the inquiry process and timeline. The inquiry process commenced in early February and was completed in late May. Adjustments to the timeline were made as necessary. The timeline below reflects the actual activity of the Inquiry Team during the inquiry process.

Date	Process
February 4, 2019	Launch inquiry teams and begin literature review.
February 25, 2019	Identify and review existing data sets and create operational definitions.
March 25, 2019	Interpret existing data sets and identify implications; design data collection methods for additional data sets that are needed.
April 15, 2019	Interpret focus group data and ideate research-based strategies aligned to the needs of UA Schools based on data set analysis.



May 13, 2019	Interpret community engagement data and prioritize recommendations.
June 3, 2019	Present recommendations to the Strategic Coordination Group for input.

A summary of each meeting was documented and shared to capture the ongoing progress of this important work. The following paragraphs demonstrate some of the engagement of the Inquiry and Advisory Teams.

February 4, 2019 - Both the inquiry and advisory teams came together for their first meeting to launch their work as part of the well-being inquiry process. After acclimating to each other and the various perspectives in the room, they learned their part in the overall strategic planning process, and processed the guidelines outlined in the charter document. Revisions of the charter document were suggested and acted upon. All members of the well-being inquiry teams will begin the visioning process this week and will be invited to contribute resources to inform the literature review.

February 25, 2019 – New members were welcomed and a quick re-introduction of everyone on the team occurred. Team member were re-grounded in the purpose of the inquiry process and reminded how we fit into the overall strategic planning process. Ongoing tensions that would be experienced as participant researchers were shared and clarification provided on what we will and will not be doing related to the recommendations (a high-level focus at the strategic level, not at the implementation level). Once the strategic plan is in place, UA will begin to form teams to implement the recommendations. Hopes, fears, and passions were identified through a Chalk Talk protocol, which created a safe space for all to participate. After summarizing these written conversations, inquiry team members engaged in the construction of the draft operational definitions of the four components of well-being being examined - student belonging, staff belonging, student balance, and staff balance. First drafts were shared and feedback was provided at the end of the meeting. An overall feeling of hopefulness and accomplishment was shared in the check-out reflections at the end of the meeting. At the Advisory Team meeting (two days later), members provided critical feedback on the draft operational definitions. Later, a subgroup was formed of both Inquiry and Advisory Team members to finalize the operational definitions.

March 25, 2019 – Updates were shared on the progress over the past month - gap analysis conducted, focus groups with students launched in grades 1-12, SCG engagement to help ideate recommendations, staff focus groups at the meeting of the Culture Competency Group (CCG), and the finalization of the operational definitions for belonging and balance. The Inquiry Team then began to dig into the literature review with an Upper Arlington perspective to pull out the most relevant information. After interpreting and discussing the literature review, they moved into data analysis. Subgroups were formed from the Inquiry Team and each team interpreted one set of data (CCG belonging, CCG balance, Gallup Q12, OHYES, and Gallup Student Engagement) related to belonging and balance. Before closing the meeting, inquiry team members partnered up and interviewed each other about their experiences with belonging and balance. At the Advisory Team meeting (two days later) they discussed the staff sections of the literature review (these sections needed more time to unpack based on the discussions of the Inquiry Team) and considered some of the implications of the quantitative data sets (OHYES, Q12, Student Engagement).



April 15, 2019 – All of the student focus group data was available, so the Inquiry Team spent time examining the data and identifying trends to summarize what was learned. With the students' voice freshest in mind and everything else learned throughout the inquiry process from the literature review and all qualitative and quantitative data sets, the Inquiry Team started to develop recommendations. All recommendations were linked to learnings from the research base shared in the literature review. Recommendations were connected and prioritized.

May 6, 2019 - A community engagement meeting was held to share the first draft of recommendations and receive feedback to refine and prioritize them. Forty-five people attended. A world café protocol was used to engage participants in meaningful conversations with each other and with those involved in the inquiry process. Some members of the Inquiry and Advisory teams facilitated the table conversations and positioned themselves as listeners and learners to gather additional insight from the community members.



May 13, 2019 – The Inquiry and Advisory Teams assembled for the final time to review the feedback and input from the community engagement meeting. They considered the viability of the recommendations and if any critical areas of need were missing. Recommendations were clustered based on their similarities and prioritized.

FINDINGS

LITERATURE REVIEW

A customized literature review was conducted by a not-for-profit organization that specializes in well-being, Generation Schools Network (GSN). The full literature review titled, *Belonging and Balance in the Lives of Students and Staff: A Literature Analysis of the Role Belonging and Balance Play in School Success*, can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/UAwellbeing>.

The Inquiry and Advisory Teams read the literature review and applied what they learned to the context of the Upper Arlington Schools. Some of the elements of the literature review that most resonated with



the team members were the importance of intentionality in creating a school culture that fosters a strong sense of belonging and balance; the need to prioritize marginalized and minority populations; the research-base that supports explicit and integrated social-emotional learning; the influence of staff belonging and balance on student belonging and balance; the important role of school leadership in bringing cohesion; the impact of the absence of balance in people’s lives; and the critical importance of relationships (student to student, staff to student, staff to staff).

This literature was so informative and educational, it is recommended that others who are interested in learning more about well-being for students and staff invest the time to read and learn from this research base.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Based on what was learned from the literature review, the Inquiry and Advisory Teams constructed operational definitions for belonging and balance. This was an iterative process with input from multiple parties and a subgroup of team members solidifying these definitions after much thoughtful contemplation and debate. It was decided that belonging and balance did not need to be defined separately in relation to students and staff, but instead could be defined in a more overarching way allowing for each to be applied to various contexts.

Belonging - A person’s feeling of safety and connectedness where they can be authentic, supported by an inclusive culture that intentionally promotes relationships, builds trust and celebrates individuals.

Balance - A person’s feeling of harmony between school and personal time that allows for satisfaction in all areas of their life.

DATA COLLECTED

A gap analysis was conducted between the existing data sets and the voices the inquiry team thought were important to inform their understanding. It was noticed that the existing data sets related to staff and student well-being were all quantitative measures and didn’t tell the stories and experiences of the people. It was also a concern that students in only grades 5-12 were represented in the quantitative data sets. To ensure a broader perspective of stakeholders informed the recommendations that would impact the future of UA Schools, additional opportunities for voice, especially using qualitative measures would be necessary. The table below summarizes the multiple data sets that informed the recommendations. Existing quantitative data sets included OHYES!, employee engagement, and student engagement surveys. Additional qualitative data sets that were gathered included a visioning survey, focus groups with students and staff, and engagement with the Strategic Coordination Group.

Data Set	Description	Perspective(s)	Learnings
OHYES!	Ohio Healthy Youth Environment Survey (Spring 2017) – a youth survey to	Students in grades 7-12 (Spring 2017);	Both school belonging and managing stress are areas that need attention. Groups who especially feel and



Data Set	Description	Perspective(s)	Learnings
	measure the health risk behaviors and environmental factors that impact youth health and safety	Note: currently these students are in grades 9-12. This survey is administered every 2 years.	experience a lack of belonging at school are non-traditional students (transgender and gender non-conforming), and non-white students especially Hispanic/Latino. As students move into higher grade levels, their amount of sleep declines.
Employee Engagement	Employee engagement survey (Gallup Q12) – 12 elements that measure employee engagement from the Gallup organization	Staff (Fall 2018)	Staff balance is a strong indicator of employee engagement. According to the survey results, 48% of the staff are not engaged and 10% are actively disengaged. The greatest areas of concern with the lowest mean scores were, “At work, my opinions seem to count,” and “In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.” It is imperative that the voice of staff is valued and engaged in a consistent and ongoing manner.
Student Engagement	Student Engagement survey (Gallup Student Poll) – measures engagement, hope, entrepreneurial aspiration, and career/financial literacy of students	Students in grades 5-12 (Fall 2018)	The engagement and hope areas of this poll are applicable to understanding belonging, but little in this data set informs balance. According to this poll, 53% of students are engaged, 31% are not engaged, and 16% are actively disengaged. Engagement decreases as students move through middle and high school. There is potential for growth in these areas, “I have fun at school; At this school I get to do what I do best every day; I have a mentor who encourages my development.” These were the lowest scoring response areas.
Survey - Visioning	Inquiry and Advisory Team members responded to a survey with open-ended questions about the desired state of belonging and balance for both staff and students.	A cross-section of UA’s population – community members, parents, staff and students (February 2019)	Respondents were asked what belonging and balance looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Some of the trends in the descriptions include being comfortable expressing feelings and ideas; feeling connected, valued, and supported; establishing healthy boundaries; being able to be their best and authentic self; collaborating and sharing ownership; and



Data Set	Description	Perspective(s)	Learnings
			thriving academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.
Focus Groups – SCG Ideation	The Strategic Coordination Group engaged in focus groups where they shared what UA Schools could start, stop, or strengthen in efforts toward improved belonging and balance.	Community members, Board members, Administration, and Faculty (March 2019)	The core ideas that emerged during this first ideation session were strengthening support for and access to extracurricular activities (range and availability in all buildings); strengthening opportunities for intentional relationship-building between students and staff (each kid has at least one adult with a strong connection); establishing intentional systems to monitoring student overscheduling and the amount of homework to reduce academic pressure; improve orientation and onboarding practices for new staff and strengthen empathy across administration and staff to increase staff voice and input; re-evaluate the use of time within the school day in regard to both learning (student use of time) and teaching.
Focus Groups - Staff	Culture Competency Group meeting – focused on staff belonging and balance.	A cross-section of staff representing all schools and both certified and classified staff (March 2019)	In regard to staff balance, staff is asking for support with work-life balance from central office and administration. They feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day to students and parents. They would like more opportunities for community building within their schools, more voice in how to use time during the school day and more input into professional learning design. In regard to belonging, staff would like more opportunities for connections to be formed within their schools, especially across the certified/classified staff since interactions are often limited during the school day.
Focus Groups - Students	School counselors in elementary, middle, and high schools conducted focus groups with strategic samples of	Students in grades 1-12 (April 2019)	Trends in student responses indicate the need for partnerships with parents to support school-life balance and the management of stress in students' lives as many feel over-scheduled although



Data Set	Description	Perspective(s)	Learnings
	<p>students with a diverse representation considering gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, cognitive/emotional aptitude, socio-economic status, etc.</p>		<p>the majority of students indicate they do have time to spend on things they enjoy doing every day.</p> <p>A lack of belonging seems to occur most often between peers most prevalently during recess and lunch (unstructured time). Students generally feel that they are cared for and an important part of the school community especially in their elementary and middle school experiences. At the secondary level, students feel that their importance is linked to activities they are participating in and that teachers didn't always notice when they were gone.</p> <p>As students move through the educational system, homework becomes a stressor. At the elementary level, very few students feel like too much homework is a problem. In middle school homework as a stressor begins to increase as well as pressure to get into college. The pressure and disconnectedness associated with social media also increases as students get older.</p> <p>Racism was a strong theme with the secondary students. They indicated they experience a school environment that is not accepting of different cultures, backgrounds and learning differences. It's hard for new students to "fit in" because of social groups that are already formed. White privilege was also identified as an area of concern for students. At the secondary level, physically most students feel safe, but emotionally they do not.</p>



RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY: STUDENT AND STAFF WELL-BEING

Put people first

After several iterations of the recommendations developed by the Inquiry Team and informed by the participants in the community engagement session, the Strategic Coordination Group, and the Advisory Team, the recommendations have been organized into 3 priority areas – integration of curriculum and practices, staff capacity, and district infrastructure.

PRIORITY 1 – INTEGRATION OF CURRICULUM AND PRACTICES

Integrate research-based, systemic Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum and practices and create a culture that honors and fosters emotional well-being, engagement and resilience in an academic setting.

- a. To develop the skills and mindsets for healthy lifelong social and emotional well-being, it is recommended that UA Schools **embed a set of system-wide, research-based Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula**.
- b. To empower students to handle the unpredictability of life and remain agile and resilient under stressful circumstances, it is recommended that the UA Schools **integrate life management strategies and habits of mind into daily classroom learning experiences** such as problem-solving, stress management, goal setting, decision-making, independence, prioritization, etc.
- c. To ensure students are safe and connected in community, it is recommended that the UA Schools **continue to strengthen a developmentally appropriate system** of student-to-student (peer-to-peer groups, buddy bench, etc.) and student-to-adult opportunities for connections (advisories, every student has an authentic connection to at least one adult, etc.).

PRIORITY 2 – STAFF CAPACITY

Build the capacity of all staff in belonging and balance so they can be strong, healthy models of well-being for students.

- a. To ensure staff practice a balanced life themselves, it is recommended that UA Schools **provide systemic programming that encourages and supports the development of healthy habits for work-life balance** (i.e., making time for regeneration, eating well, exercising, efficiency, prioritization, setting boundaries, email management, shared responsibility, creating structures and routines, etc.).
- b. To create a connected workforce where staff feel and demonstrate a sense of belonging, it is recommended that UA Schools **provide opportunities for cultivating relationships among staff** through collective inquiry practices, collaboration to strengthen their professional practice, and a staff mentoring and networking system to help all staff get connected in meaningful ways.
- c. To provide a consistent and integrated system of support for students' well-being, it is recommended that UA Schools **engage all staff in strategic learning experiences** that increase their depth of knowledge in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) practices and beliefs and strengthen their expertise and implementation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices and beliefs.

PRIORITY 3 – DISTRICT INFRASTRUCTURE



Develop an infrastructure at the district level to coordinate and support effective staff and student well-being initiatives and programming.

- a. To lead this strategic focus on staff and student well-being, it is recommended that the UA Schools **hire a district-level coordinator and provide necessary resources** to successfully implement and monitor UA's well-being initiatives, especially those related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).
- b. To ensure well-being initiatives are making an impact and resources are being maximized, it is recommended that the UA Schools **implement a system for frequent qualitative and quantitative data collection** to monitor student and staff balance, belongingness, and emotional wellbeing, track student interest and involvement, and identify and link students to opportunities aligned with individual interests and values.
- c. To educate the broader school community to understand the world around them and the people who live in it and to bring cohesion and momentum to these efforts, it is recommended that the UA Schools **develop a communications campaign**. This campaign would include branding, education, and outreach. Priority topics for education include habits and mindsets that drive strong well-being, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The priority stakeholder outreach is to parents. Developing a **parent education initiative** that bridges home and school life will support parents as they navigate each child's journey to adulthood.
- d. To attain a sense of belonging, is critical that each student knows an adult within their school that shares common perspectives and life experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that the UA Schools **evaluate and improve talent acquisition and management practices** to recruit, hire, and retain a more diverse staff with unique differences that reflect the broader world we live in. Research suggests this will benefit both individuals from underrepresented groups and those who identify with less marginalized groups.

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ADDENDUMS

ADDENDUM A – LITERATURE REVIEW

ADDENDUM B – 2017 OHYES! DATA

ADDENDUM C – EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT REPORT (GALLUP)

ADDENDUM D – STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REPORT (GALLUP)



ADDENDUM A – LITERATURE REVIEW

Access the full document here: <https://tinyurl.com/UAwell-being>

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INSERT ADDENDUMS B, C, AND D (all PDFs).