EMERALD**HANDBOOKS**

THE EMERALD HANDBOOK OF WELLBEING IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

INITIATIVES, PRACTICES, AND STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT FLOURISHING IN SCHOOLS

EDITED BY
KEITH D. **WALKER**
BENJAMIN **KUTSYURUBA**
JULIA **MAHFOUZ**
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The Emerald Handbook of Wellbeing in School Leadership

This handbook makes a timely and important intervention in educational leadership scholarship by demonstrating how leadership is implicated in the production of wellbeing across complex systems, rather than merely responding to its absence. By foregrounding interdependence across individual, organisational, and systemic levels, the handbook provides both conceptual clarity and empirical insight. It is a serious and welcome contribution to ongoing debates about the purposes and practices of educational leadership that will resonate across research, policy, and professional audiences.

—*Steven Courtney*, Professor of Sociology of Education Leadership, Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester

This handbook provides a transformative and timely examination of educational leadership, repositioning wellbeing from a peripheral concern to the very core of school success.

Drawing on rich, contextually grounded research offering a diverse international perspective, this handbook is a call to action for educators to move toward a systems-thinking approach, transforming the underlying conditions that produce stress into environments where purpose, belonging, and growth can thrive. For any researcher, policymaker, or practitioner committed to the sustainability of the teaching profession, this handbook is an essential guide for building healthy, flourishing, and thriving communities.

—*Christopher Bezzina*, PhD, Professor of Educational Leadership, Department of Leadership for Learning & Innovation, Faculty of Education, University of Malta

The editors of *The Emerald Handbook of Wellbeing in School Leadership: Initiatives, Practices, and Structures to Support Flourishing in Schools* have given us a marvelous book that provides a comprehensive view of the manner in which school leaders around the world are dealing with their personal wellbeing and ability to flourish. It is insightful and powerful! It should be read by everyone who prepares school leaders, those who supervise them, and school leaders who want to foster their own wellbeing. It's a wonderful contribution to the literature!

—*Frances Kochan*, PhD, Wayne T. Smith Distinguished Professor, Emerita, Auburn University

This theoretically compelling yet practical volume offers a comprehensive and responsive exploration of educator and school leader wellbeing, resilience, and flourishing across diverse contexts. Grounded in empirical research and innovative frameworks, it lays an evidence-based foundation for fostering sustainable leadership and thriving learning communities, with notable draws from trauma-informed practice, collaborative mindfulness, intentional self-care, and

strength-based school improvement. This book is an essential resource for those committed to nurturing healthy, resilient schools where leaders, teachers, and students can flourish together.

—*Amy Burns*, PhD, Dean and Professor, Faculty of Education, Queen's University

The Emerald Handbook of Wellbeing in School Leadership arrives at a critical moment in educational leadership scholarship, offering a richly diverse, international collection that reconceptualizes wellbeing not as a peripheral concern but as the very foundation of effective, sustainable school leadership. The handbook covers individual, relational, organizational, and systemic dimensions of flourishing and draws on a wide range of theoretical frameworks – from self-determination theory, resilience research, positive leadership, and systems thinking – then ties them to real-world practices that school leaders can immediately recognize and apply. Editors Walker, Kutsyuruba, Mahfouz, and Cherkowski have assembled a landmark volume that will be indispensable reading for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners committed to cultivating thriving school communities.

—*Jeffrey Glanz*, Professor, Director of MS Degree Program in Educational Administration, Michlalah-Jerusalem College

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Editors



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Sabre Cherkowski, PhD, is a Professor in the Okanagan School of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC). She holds the UBCO Tier 1 Principal's Research Chair in Leadership, Learning, and Wellbeing. Her research focuses on leadership, professional learning and development, educator wellbeing, learning communities, and school organizing. She has been recognized for her innovative research, receiving UBC Okanagan's 2020 Researcher of the Year award for Social Sciences and Humanities. She explores how positive leadership can foster a culture of flourishing in schools, emphasizing the importance of strengths and positive outlooks to increase resilience, vitality, and happiness. She is also the Academic Lead for the Doctor of Education Program at UBC Okanagan. Her work integrates ideas from positive psychology and positive organization studies to promote wellbeing in educational settings.

About the Contributors

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Tyrone Bynoe is a Full Professor of Education and Director of Educational Leadership Programs, St. Bonaventure University, New York. Along with his current assignment, he held teaching and educational leadership responsibilities with two other universities. His higher education experience in school leadership preparation totals 19 years. He earned an EdD in Educational Administration from Teachers College-Columbia University. He also earned a BA in American History, MA in Social Sciences, MS Ed in Educational Administration and Policy Studies, and an MA in American History, all from the University of Albany. He has published and refereed manuscripts in numerous scholarly journals. He has several administrative and teaching licenses in Kentucky and New York. He has a rich background in supervisory and pedagogical practice. He has been a New York State Public School Administrator supervising grades K–12, and he has considerable experience as a History and Social Studies teacher.

Gina Cherkowski, PhD, is the Social Emotional Learning Implementation Lead at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. She is a researcher and implementation leader whose work advances equity, inclusion, wellbeing, and mental health in schools and communities. Her research examines how

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Marissa Cisneros-Perez is a strategic educational leader serving as the Elementary Literacy Coordinator for Edgewood ISD. In this capacity, she manages a team of nine instructional coaches and directs the implementation of evidence-based literacy curriculum and assessments across district campuses. A certified Master Reading Teacher and Texas HB3 Reading Academies Cohort Leader, she specializes in designing high-impact professional development for district and state audiences. Her leadership expertise is distinguished by her participation in the Harvard University Turn Around Leaders Cohort. Currently a third-year PhD student at the University of Texas at San Antonio, she also holds Master's degrees in Reading and Teaching. Formerly an Adjunct Faculty Member at the University of the Incarnate Word, she is dedicated to empowering educators through data-driven leadership.

Megan Crawford is an Emeritus Professor in Leadership at Coventry University. She was previously a Reader in Educational Leadership at Cambridge University. Her career has developed from primary schools, where she was a Deputy Headteacher. Her teaching expertise is in postgraduate programs, and in particular, the needs of the part-time students. She has been a governor of six schools and set up three new primary and one new secondary school in Milton Keynes. She is currently Chair of a Multi-Academy Trust. She has worked on many research projects for the Department for Education on aspects of leadership in schools. She has written over 50 articles and book chapters on both educational leadership practice and theory, two sole-authored books, and many edited books. Her particular research interests are the emotions of leadership and the development of education policy in schools and higher education.

Susan J. Davis, EdD, is a researcher and practitioner whose work focuses on mindfulness-based program implementation, social-emotional learning, leadership, and collaborative approaches to community wellbeing. She earned her Doctorate in Leadership for Educational Equity from the University of Colorado Denver, where her dissertation examined how cross-sector partnerships support the implementation of Learning to BREATHE in a US school district. She has contributed to mixed-methods evaluations of school-based SEL and mindfulness initiatives, including Learning to BREATHE, Second Step + Bully Prevention, Calm Minds Kind Hearts, and Be CALM, where she supports curriculum adaptation, trainer preparation, and implementation tools. A former School Counseling and SEL Coordinator, she has led district-wide professional development, facilitated community partnerships, and supported culturally responsive SEL implementation across K–12 systems. Her work centers on equity, relational trust, and the role of leadership in promoting collective wellbeing.

Danielle Denichaud weaves between the fields of somatics, wellbeing, and education in her roles as university lecturer, holistic health consultant, and inter-arts curator. Through movement, philosophy, poetry, and science, she stewards embodied languages that activate wonderment and compassion in relationship with suffering, and in service to peace. For 20 years, she has studied traditional and contemporary holistic health sciences, supporting her personal recovery from chronic illness and injury, and informing her 15 years of clinical work with newborns to elders. Her current research looks at the synergy between compassionate approaches to health promotion and praxes of community care in educational settings. She has spoken internationally on the fecundity of embodied education for living practices of hope, shares her distinct approach to pedagogical salutogenesis as a Lecturer at the University of Toronto Mississauga and Toronto Metropolitan University, and in her inter-arts work with Dreamwalker Dance Company and Eilers Dance Theatre.

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Lisa M. Everitt, EdD, has worked as an Executive Staff Officer with the Alberta Teachers Association (the "Association") since 2006. She has developed expertise in labor relations, employee benefits plans, education research, strategic planning, and women in educational leadership. She taught high school mathematics for 13 years in both the Northwest Territories and Alberta.

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Sharon Friesen, PhD, is a Professor at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research interests include the ways in which K–12 educational structures, leadership, teaching, and learning need to be redesigned to meet the demands of contemporary society. She draws upon and contributes to the fields of the learning sciences and educational leadership to study: (i) design-based professional learning, (ii) school and district leadership, (iii) educational reform, and (iv) research–practice partnerships.

Andréanne Gélinas-Proulx, PhD, is a Professor of Leadership and Education Management at the Université du Québec en Outaouais since 2014. She is interested in the work of school principals and their professional development, as it relates to issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice in a context of diversity. Her professional experience includes roles as a primary school teacher and a school principal. She is presently a Co-editor of the *Leadership and Administration* collection at the Presses de l'Université du Québec. She is also one of the coordination members of the Research and Intervention Group on the Work Organization of School Principals in Québec, Canada.

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Roula Hadchiti, PhD, is a Professor of Educational Administration and Policy at Laval University in Quebec. Her teaching and research focus primarily on school principals and those preparing for such roles. Her professional background includes experience as both an elementary school teacher and principal, which has informed her research interests and led to a focus on finding solutions to the challenges currently faced by school principals. She is currently a regular Researcher of the Research and Intervention Group on the Work Organization of School Principals in Québec, Canada. Her research focuses on supporting school principals through mentoring, leadership development, maintaining their wellbeing at work, and developing their emotional competencies.

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Sherri Humphrys, EdD, is dedicated to cultivating cohesive communities and supporting the growth of others from a foundation built on authenticity, kindness, and humor. As a principal of diverse K-9 settings in Alberta spanning 30+ years, her leadership consistently focuses on transforming school cultures – shifting

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Kimberlee Johnston is an education leader with over 35 years' experience. She has envisioned system wide changes to support student assessment through a collaborative app, written multiple drama curricula for the public sector, and co-wrote an arts document to simplify teaching the arts for non-specialist teachers. Over the past 15 years, she has been sought by many administrative teams to design personalized professional development plans to meet school improvement goals. Her expertise and understanding of the need for balance and boundaries in education have led many educators and administrators to seek her support as a mentor. As a certified professional coach, with a Master of International Education (School Leadership), and now a retired Principal supporting schools, she is enjoying her next chapter in life as an entrepreneur. In 2022, she founded Recess Coaching

and Consulting to support all professions within education to find their way back to joy.

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Jacqueline Kirk holds a PhD from the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Leadership and Educational Administration in the Faculty of Education at Brandon University. She is dedicated to creating conditions that allow all people to experience a good and meaningful life. Her academic work explores how school leadership has the potential to shape wellbeing, positivity, and a sense of belonging within educational communities. These commitments ground her research interests, which include understanding the experiences of international students in Canada, the counseling role of school principals, leader wellness, and the use of storytelling as a path to individual and collective wellbeing. She is continually inspired by her work with both graduate and undergraduate students and draws on her research to understand their experiences as teachers and emerging educational leaders.

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Jennifer Lomas is an innovative educator with over 25 years, currently serving as an elementary principal in North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas. Her professional background spans early childhood through high school and included roles as a classroom teacher, athletic coach, athletic director, and campus curriculum coordinator. She holds a Master of Education in School Administration from Trinity

University in San Antonio. She specializes in adopting innovative approaches to meet the diverse needs of her school communities, and her leadership expertise is characterized by a deep commitment to all stakeholders. Grounded by her family as a wife, mother, daughter, and sister, she brings a relational and compassionate approach to leadership. She is currently pursuing her Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Stephen MacGregor, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Governance at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education. His research investigates how knowledge mobilization serves as a mechanism for educational change in complex systems. He focuses on the relational networks that connect universities, schools, and communities; the role of positive leadership in advancing research-informed practice; and the mechanisms and impacts of co-production in knowledge creation. He also leads large-scale studies on the implementation of mental health initiatives and experiential learning in higher education and has been recognized internationally for his scholarship.

Sanam Maskey, PhD, is a Lecturer in the Masters of Professional Practice Program at the Wellington Institute of Technology, New Zealand. He holds a Doctorate in Education from Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington and his research interests center on issues relating culturally responsive pedagogy, curricular decolonization, social justice, and education policy.

Shannon McCurdy, PhD, is an Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education for Baldwin County, AL schools. She has served as an English Language Arts teacher, assistant principal, and principal before her role as an assistant superintendent. Her schools have received numerous accolades, including Cognia STEM certification, Purple Star designation, and recognition as a Leader in Me Lighthouse School. Her emphasis on fostering a positive culture earned Mathis Elementary multiple "Best of Baldwin" awards for its staff and programs. She was nominated for NAESP Distinguished Principal of the Year in 2025.

Sharlene McHolm is a practicing elementary school administrator in Ontario, Canada. With 22 years' experience as a vice-principal and principal, she brings a deep understanding of the school leadership context. With a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, she saw the growing crisis of leaders leaving the profession early. She grounds her academic work in the realities of the job by focusing on leadership wellbeing through her understanding of K–12 teaching and administrative experience. She also teaches part-time in Wilfrid Laurier University's Bachelor of Education Program. Her research areas of interest include wellbeing, social justice, and access to educational opportunities and neurodiversity inclusion.

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Foreword

Educational leadership has long been concerned with improving teaching, strengthening schools as organizations, and advancing student learning. Increasingly, however, scholars and practitioners recognize that the success of these efforts rests on a more fundamental condition: the wellbeing of those who lead and sustain school communities. Today's school leaders operate in environments marked by rapid change, rising expectations, and significant social pressures. In such circumstances, the capacity of schools to support meaningful teaching and learning depends not only on policies or structures but also on the wellbeing and resilience of the people who guide educational communities.

Throughout my work with school leaders over many years, I have often been struck by the remarkable commitment that principals and other leaders bring to their roles. Leadership in schools is deeply meaningful work, yet it is also demanding in ways that are not always visible from the outside. School leaders support teachers, guide instructional improvement, respond to students' needs, engage families and communities, and navigate policy expectations, often simultaneously. Conversations with leaders across different contexts consistently reveal the same challenge. Sustaining leadership over time requires not only professional expertise but also personal resilience and supportive professional environments.

This important volume, edited by Keith D. Walker, Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Julia Mahfouz, and Sabre Cherkowski, addresses this challenge with impressive depth and breadth. The editors have long been thoughtful and influential contributors to scholarship on educational leadership, flourishing, and the human dimensions of schooling. Their work consistently reminds us that leadership is not only about improving systems and outcomes, but also about cultivating conditions that enable individuals and communities to thrive. By bringing together an international group of scholars and practitioners, this handbook offers a rich, multifaceted exploration of wellbeing in school leadership.

One of the strengths of this collection lies in its recognition that wellbeing in education cannot be reduced to individual wellbeing alone. Instead, it is a multidimensional phenomenon that unfolds across interconnected levels, shaping the experiences of leaders, teachers, and students alike.

At the most immediate level, wellbeing concerns the experiences of school leaders themselves. Leadership roles involve significant emotional, cognitive, and moral demands, and sustaining a sense of balance, meaning, and resilience is essential for leaders who wish to remain effective over time. Several chapters in

this volume explore how leaders develop resilience, navigate the pressures of their roles, and sustain their professional commitment across different career stages.

Leadership wellbeing, however, does not end with the leader. School leaders play a decisive role in shaping the wellbeing of teachers and other members of the school community. Through their daily interactions, decisions, and priorities, leaders influence whether teachers feel supported, trusted, and able to engage deeply with their work. When leaders foster environments characterized by respect, collaboration, and shared purpose, they create professional cultures where educators can flourish.

A further dimension concerns the organizational and systemic conditions that shape wellbeing in schools. Policies, institutional structures, leadership preparation programs, and school cultures all influence the environments in which leaders and teachers operate. The chapters in this handbook illuminate how wellbeing can be supported not only through individual practices but also through thoughtful organizational design and sustained attention to the human dimensions of schooling.

In recent years, I have become increasingly convinced that discussions of wellbeing in education are closely connected to the broader idea of resilience. Schools today operate in environments that are often unpredictable and demanding. Educational communities are asked to respond to crises, social tensions, and rapidly changing societal expectations. In such contexts, resilience becomes a critical capacity not only for individuals but also for entire educational communities.

The idea of a pedagogy of resilience highlights the role of education in helping individuals and communities navigate uncertainty while sustaining hope, agency, and purpose. From this perspective, leadership is not only about managing schools effectively. It is also about cultivating environments in which people can confront challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and continue to grow.

School leaders play a central role in shaping such environments. Their actions influence how challenges are interpreted, how support systems are mobilized, and how communities respond to adversity. Leaders who attend to their own and others' wellbeing are better positioned to foster school cultures in which resilience becomes a shared capacity rather than an individual burden.

Importantly, wellbeing in education should not be understood merely as comfort or the absence of difficulty. Teaching and leading are demanding endeavors that require sustained effort and thoughtful decision-making. Wellbeing is closely connected to deeper human experiences such as belonging, dignity, meaning, and professional purpose. Schools are not simply organizations that deliver instruction. They are communities in which individuals seek recognition, connection, and opportunities to contribute to something meaningful.

Leadership, therefore, plays a critical role in shaping these experiences. Through their actions and values, school leaders signal what matters within the school community. They influence whether teachers feel trusted and empowered, whether students feel seen and supported, and whether the broader school culture encourages collaboration and shared responsibility. When leaders intentionally cultivate such environments, they help create conditions in which both individuals and organizations can flourish.

The chapters gathered in this handbook illustrate the many ways in which educational leaders can promote wellbeing across these different dimensions. The authors draw on diverse contexts and perspectives, offering conceptual insights alongside practical strategies. Together, these contributions demonstrate that promoting wellbeing is not a single intervention or program but an ongoing leadership endeavor that involves relational awareness, reflective practice, supportive structures, and thoughtful policy frameworks.

Another valuable feature of this volume is its international perspective. The chapters reflect diverse educational contexts and remind us that while systems may differ, the human challenges of leadership are widely shared. School leaders across the world face similar questions as they strive to support educators, nurture students, and build learning environments that sustain both excellence and care.

The editors deserve special recognition for assembling such a thoughtful and comprehensive collection. Their work reflects a deep commitment to understanding the human dimensions of educational leadership and to advancing conversations that are both intellectually rigorous and practically meaningful. By placing wellbeing at the center of this handbook, they invite us to reconsider leadership not only as a matter of effectiveness but also as a practice grounded in care, responsibility, and human flourishing.

This handbook will be valuable to a wide range of readers. Scholars of educational leadership will find in it a rich set of conceptual perspectives and research insights that deepen our understanding of wellbeing in educational contexts. School leaders and leadership preparation programs will discover practical ideas and reflective frameworks that can inform leadership practice. Policymakers and system leaders may also find important guidance for designing educational environments that support professional sustainability and the flourishing of school communities.

Ultimately, the future of education depends not only on policies, structures, or reforms but also on the quality of the human relationships that sustain school communities. Schools flourish when the individuals within them experience a sense of purpose, trust, and belonging. When leaders attend thoughtfully to wellbeing, they help cultivate environments in which teachers feel supported, students feel valued, and learning can continue to thrive even in times of uncertainty. Leadership that prioritizes wellbeing therefore does more than strengthen schools; it helps sustain resilient educational communities capable of nurturing hope, care, and shared flourishing for generations to come.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Promoting Leader and Organizational Wellbeing in Schools

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Abstract

The handbook draws on diverse international contexts and methodological approaches to collectively explore how wellbeing is cultivated, enacted, and sustained in and through educational leadership. This introductory chapter first describes theoretical perspectives and frameworks reflected through the chapters. We then offer short summaries of the sections and chapters in this book and provide a guide to readers regarding what each of the chapters in this edited book may bring to our collective understandings of wellbeing as a multi-layered, dynamic construct that is co-constructed across individuals, relationships, organizations, and systems.

Keywords: Wellbeing; flourishing; schools; strength-based approaches; leadership

Introduction

Across the educational field, we've noticed that the question of constituent wellbeing has moved from the margins to the center of scholarly, policy, and practice conversations. Researchers and practitioners recognize that the sustainability of

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school improvement, the quality of teaching and learning, and the health of educational communities are deeply intertwined with the wellbeing of those who lead and inhabit these spaces (Cherkowski et al., 2020; Kutsyuruba et al, 2021; Mahfouz, 2019, 2025; Montemurro et al., 2023). This handbook responds to that growing recognition by bringing together a diverse set of scholars and practitioners who examine wellbeing not as an individual attribute alone but as a relational, organizational, and systemic phenomenon. While early research often framed wellbeing in terms of individual stress management or burnout prevention, contemporary scholarship has moved toward more inclusive perspectives to understand wellbeing on a systems level. The chapters in this handbook move beyond deficit-oriented narratives of burnout and stress to foreground strengths-based transformational approaches. From Solomon Islands to England, from Canada to Jamaica, from Nepal to the United States, the authors explore how wellbeing is presented through mentorship, community, ethical leadership, trauma-informed practices, and organizational design. We hope that this handbook contributes to that shift by positioning wellbeing as a multi-layered, dynamic construct that is co-constructed across individuals, relationships, organizations, and systems.

Positioning Wellbeing Within Leadership Research

Leadership in education can no longer be understood as a purely technical or managerial function; it also requires a parallel rethinking of leadership itself. Leadership needs to be conceptualized as an aspect of relational and emotional practice that is deeply connected to the wellbeing of the school leader and all those within the system (Day & Sammons, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). Leadership directly shapes the psychological and emotional conditions of schools, influencing not only organizational effectiveness but also the lived experiences of teachers and students (Grissom et al., 2021; Hallinger, 2011). In this sense, leadership is not external to wellbeing but, rather, leadership is one of the primary mechanisms of the production of wellbeing.

At the individual level, the literature on school leadership has consistently documented the intensity and complexity of the principalship. School leaders operate within environments characterized by constant change, competing demands, and high accountability pressures, all of which contribute to elevated levels of stress and emotional exhaustion (Fullan, 2014; Pollock et al., 2015; Wells & Klocko, 2015). As noted in prior research, principals are required to "operate in multiple dimensions at once," moving between individual support, organizational management, and system-level improvement, often within constrained time and resource conditions (Mahfouz, 2020). These conditions are not simply challenging – they are structurally unsustainable when leader wellbeing is not intentionally supported. Empirical studies have shown that prolonged exposure to such stressors can diminish leaders' self-efficacy, impair decision-making, and contribute to burnout, ultimately undermining their capacity to lead effectively (e.g., Mahfouz & Richardson, 2020; Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

This handbook draws on diverse international contexts and methodological approaches as the sections collectively explore how wellbeing is cultivated,

enacted, and sustained in and through educational leadership. We invite readers to notice several theoretical perspectives and frameworks reflected through the chapters. Deci and Ryan's (2000) *self-determination theory* (SDT) is evident in many of the chapters. This illustrates how leadership practices either support or constrain the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundational psychological needs for both leaders and those they serve. Resilience is a theme reflected across many chapters. Masten's (2014) resilience theory informs discussions around how individuals and systems adapt and thrive amid adversity, emphasizing protective factors such as meaning-making.

As the focus of the first section is on school leader wellbeing, we are able to see how the *Prosocial School Leader Model* is mirrored in the authors' contributions (Mahfouz et al., 2025). The model shows how school leaders' wellbeing forms the foundation that influences teacher functioning and wellbeing, family and community partnerships, implementation of social and emotional learning programs at the school and the overall school climate, and downstream student outcomes (Mahfouz et al., 2019). The Prosocial School Leader Model provides a foundation for understanding these dynamics by positioning leaders' social and emotional competencies (SECs) and wellbeing as central drivers of broader organizational outcomes (Mahfouz et al., 2025). Yet, beyond individual competencies, the model also implicitly calls attention to the relational processes through which wellbeing is enacted. For instance, leaders influence teacher wellbeing, not only through formal policies or structures but through everyday interactions such as listening, responding, modeling care, and creating conditions of trust (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2021). Empirical research has consistently shown that such relational leadership practices are associated with higher levels of teacher wellbeing, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Collie et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). At the same time, leadership for others' wellbeing extends beyond interpersonal relationships to include the intentional design of organizational conditions. Leaders shape workload expectations, professional learning opportunities, and school culture in ways that either support or undermine teacher wellbeing (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). In this sense, leadership is both relational and structural – it involves not only how leaders interact with others but also how they construct the systems within which those interactions occur.

We also see how *relational leadership* and *ethics of care* (Noddings, 2013) frame leadership as fundamentally grounded in relationships and moral responsibility. However, the expectation that leaders care for others often unfolds in tension with their ability to care for themselves. The literature on leadership and self-care highlights a persistent pattern in which school leaders prioritize the needs of teachers, students, and communities while neglecting their own wellbeing (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Mahfouz, 2018). This imbalance is not incidental; it is embedded within professional norms that equate leadership with self-sacrifice. Such norms are increasingly being challenged by research demonstrating that leader self-care is not a luxury but a prerequisite for sustainable leadership. Leaders who fail to attend to their own wellbeing are more likely to experience emotional depletion, reduced relational capacity, and diminished effectiveness in

supporting others (Harms et al., 2017; Skakon et al., 2010). This is particularly evident in the *emotional labor* of leadership. Educational leaders are responsible not only for organizational outcomes but also for managing the emotional climate of their schools. They are expected to absorb, regulate, and respond to the emotions of others, often in contexts marked by uncertainty, trauma, and systemic inequities. As research on emotional leadership suggests, this work requires a high degree of emotional awareness and regulation, as leaders' emotional expressions can significantly influence the motivation, engagement, and wellbeing of those around them (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Humphrey, 2012; Mahfouz & Anthony Stevens, 2020; Mahfouz et al., 2021). Without adequate support, however, this emotional labor can lead to compassion fatigue, further reinforcing the need for integrated approaches to leader wellbeing.

From a systemic lens, *positive leadership* is projected in some chapters (Cherkowski et al., 2020; Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). The framework positions organizations and schools as relational and meaning-driven spaces where flourishing is intentionally cultivated rather than left to chance as school leaders animate environments by grounding work in a shared sense of purpose, engaging others with presence and care, fostering passion through strengths and collective energy, and creating spaces for play, creativity, and renewal.

Building on this perspective, a *systems-thinking* approach to leadership and wellbeing offers a critical extension of the field. Systems-thinking emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals, relationships, and organizational structures, highlighting how changes in one part of the system reverberate across the whole (Senge, 2006). Within educational contexts, this means recognizing that wellbeing is not an isolated outcome but an emergent property of the system itself. Therefore, leadership must move beyond addressing individual symptoms of stress or burnout toward transforming the underlying conditions that produce them.

This shift is closely aligned with the concept of *flourishing*, which has gained increasing attention in both educational and organizational research. Flourishing is understood not merely as the absence of distress but as the presence of positive functioning, meaning, and engagement at both individual and collective levels (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011). In schools, flourishing involves creating environments where students, teachers, and leaders experience a sense of purpose, belonging, and growth. Leadership plays a central role in cultivating these conditions by aligning vision, practices, and relationships toward shared goals that prioritize both performance and wellbeing (Cherkowski et al., 2020; Kutsyuruba et al., 2021). Systems-oriented leadership for wellbeing requires moving away from deficit-based approaches that focus solely on fixing problems. Instead, it calls for a strengths-based orientation that builds on existing capacities within individuals and communities. Research on positive organizational scholarship suggests that such approaches can enhance resilience, foster innovation, and support long-term sustainability (Cameron, 2012). In educational settings, this translates into leadership practices that elevate voice, promote collaboration, and create space for reflection, creativity, and renewal.

However, the literature also reveals important limitations in how leadership and wellbeing have been conceptualized and operationalized within educational

research and practice. While there has been a growing recognition of the importance of wellbeing, much of the work in this area remains fragmented, often isolating individual, relational, or organizational dimensions rather than examining their interdependence (Dodge et al., 2012; Ryff & Singer, 2008; White, 2017). In many cases, wellbeing continues to be approached as an outcome to be measured – through indicators such as stress levels, burnout, or job satisfaction rather than as an ongoing, dynamic process that is shaped through leadership practices and systemic conditions (Dodge et al., 2012; Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schnell, 2021; Seligman, 2011). This tendency risks reducing wellbeing to a reactive construct, addressed only after challenges emerge, rather than positioning it as a proactive and integral dimension of leadership.

From a leadership perspective, this fragmentation is further reinforced by the persistence of models that privilege technical and managerial competencies over relational and human-centered practices. Although instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership frameworks have significantly contributed to our understanding of effective schooling (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020; Spillane, 2006), they have historically paid limited attention to the emotional and wellbeing dimensions of leadership. Even within transformational leadership, where attention to motivation and relationships is emphasized, wellbeing is often treated as a byproduct of effective leadership rather than as a central construct shaping leadership itself (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Day et al., 2016). This creates a conceptual gap in which leadership is acknowledged as influencing wellbeing but is not fully theorized as being constituted through it.

Emerging perspectives in leadership studies begin to address this gap by foregrounding the adaptive and human dimensions of leadership. For example, *adaptive leadership* emphasizes the capacity of leaders to navigate complexity, uncertainty, and change by engaging stakeholders in collective problem-solving and learning (Heifetz et al., 2009). Within this framework, leadership is less about providing solutions and more about creating the conditions for others to engage meaningfully with challenges. This aligns closely with a wellbeing-oriented perspective, as leaders are required to attend not only to technical problems but also to the emotional and relational dynamics that shape how individuals and groups respond to change. As such, this implicitly centers wellbeing, as the ability of individuals and groups to remain engaged, resilient, and meaning-oriented becomes essential to navigating adaptive challenges (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). In this sense, leadership becomes a practice of holding space for both discomfort and growth, rather than resolving tensions prematurely.

Similarly, the *Job Demands–Resources* (JD-R) model provides an important lens for understanding how leadership practices influence wellbeing through the structuring of work environments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to this model, employee wellbeing is shaped by the balance between job demands (e.g., workload, emotional demands) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy, opportunities for growth). School leaders play a critical role in mediating this balance, either exacerbating demands or enhancing resources through their decisions and interactions. Research in educational settings has shown that when

leaders create supportive environments characterized by trust, autonomy, and meaningful professional engagement, teachers are more likely to experience higher levels of wellbeing and motivation. Conversely, when demands are high and resources are limited, the risk of burnout increases significantly. This highlights the importance of leadership not only as a relational practice but also as a structural force that shapes the conditions under which wellbeing is possible.

At the same time, *distributed leadership* perspectives further complicate the relationship between leadership and wellbeing by challenging the notion of leadership as residing within a single individual. Instead, leadership is understood as a practice that is stretched across multiple actors and interactions within the organization. From a wellbeing perspective, this suggests that responsibility for cultivating wellbeing is also distributed, emerging through collective practices rather than being solely dependent on formal leaders. However, this does not diminish the role of school leaders; rather, this perspective repositions leaders as facilitators of conditions that enable others to exercise leadership in ways that support collective wellbeing. In this sense, leaders become architects of environments where relational trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility can flourish.

Another critical dimension that warrants deeper attention is the role of *identity* and *meaning* in leadership and wellbeing. Research in organizational psychology has increasingly emphasized the importance of meaningful work as a core component of wellbeing (Rosso et al., 2010). For school leaders, meaning is often derived from a sense of purpose, moral commitment, and alignment between personal values and professional roles. However, when leaders experience dissonance between these elements – such as when external accountability pressures conflict with their educational values – their sense of wellbeing can be significantly undermined. This highlights the importance of leadership approaches that support not only performance but also coherence, allowing leaders to enact their roles in ways that are aligned with their identities and values.

In addition, critical perspectives on wellbeing remind us that not all experiences of stress or struggle are individual in origin; many are rooted in broader systemic inequities and structural constraints. For example, leaders working in under-resourced or marginalized communities often face compounded challenges that extend beyond the boundaries of the school (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016). In such contexts, wellbeing cannot be fully understood or addressed without considering issues of equity, power, and social justice. Therefore, leadership for wellbeing must also be leadership for equity – actively working to transform the conditions that produce inequitable experiences of stress, exclusion, and marginalization.

These perspectives suggest that advancing the field requires moving beyond isolated or additive approaches to leadership and wellbeing. Instead, there is a need for integrative frameworks that account for the complexity and interconnectedness of these constructs. Leadership must be understood as both shaping and being shaped by wellbeing, operating across individual, relational, and systemic levels simultaneously. This requires not only expanding existing models but

also rethinking foundational assumptions about what leadership is and what it is for. These perspectives also suggest that leadership and wellbeing are inseparable across three interconnected levels: the wellbeing of the leader, the wellbeing of others, and the wellbeing of the system. Each level both influences and is influenced by the others – in a dynamic and reciprocal process. Leaders' internal capacities shape their relationships, relationships shape organizational conditions, and organizational conditions shape the experiences of all members within the system. Understanding these interdependencies is essential for advancing both research and practice in educational leadership.

Overview of the Handbook

Our handbook is organized into three interrelated sections that reflect the complexity of wellbeing: (1) school leader wellbeing, (2) leadership wellbeing for impact, and (3) organization and system-level wellbeing.

Section 1 focuses on the school leader wellbeing, offering insights into how wellbeing is shaped through personal, relational, and contextual factors.

In Chapter 2, Kabini Sanga and Martyn Reynolds argue that in Solomon Islands, school leader wellbeing and resilience are fundamentally relational and collective, rooted in *kastom* (Indigenous cultures) and expressed through practices such as *tok stori* (Indigenous discursive storying). Using a case study of the Graduate Certificate in School Leadership, a program of the University of the South Pacific, the chapter shows how contextually grounded, relational professional learning strengthens leaders' confidence, collaboration, and ability to create supportive environments that enhance collective wellbeing.

In Chapter 3, Andrew J. Hobson and Linda J. Searby offer an original and empirically grounded account of two ONSIDE mentoring schemes for school principals in England, in which one scheme cultivated unidirectional mentoring relationships with experienced principals who supported relative novices, while the other facilitated bidirectional peer-mentoring relationships among more established principals. The authors explore the nature and the reported impacts of mentoring relationships within both schemes, focusing especially on principals' wellbeing and the contextual and relational factors that contributed to the observed positive effects.

In Chapter 4, Ashlyen Singh presents findings from a Canadian phenomenological study examining how school administrators' wellbeing functions as a mediating factor between workplace stress and leadership effectiveness. The author introduces a framework illustrating the dynamic interaction between stress appraisal, coping strategies, and four interconnected dimensions of wellbeing – leadership behaviors, interpersonal identity, intrapersonal identity, and personal capacity – demonstrating how leaders' perceptions and responses to stress shape both their wellbeing and their ability to lead effectively.

In Chapter 5, Marie-Christine Rivest, Roula Hadchiti, and Andréanne Gélinas-Proulx present findings from a qualitative study exploring how intentional self-care practices, integrated into a university course in Québec, Canada, for aspiring and newly appointed school principals, enhanced their wellbeing and

resilience. The chapter highlights the importance of embedding self-care and resilience-building strategies within principal preparation programs.

In Chapter 6, Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Nadia Arghash, Deborah Outhwaite, Megan Crawford, and Shelly Gelman present findings from a qualitative study exploring the experiences of flourishing among head teachers from Challenge Partners' "Growing the Top" program for outstanding schools in England. The chapter describes how six school leaders perceived and experienced flourishing in their professional lives and what supports contributed to their wellbeing, allowing them to thrive despite the pressures of their roles.

In Chapter 7, Tyrone Bynoe and David Ersig describe how a continuum of school leadership preparation can invigorate school building leaders with resilience and wellbeing to respond to the multiplicity of work demands and responsibilities built in this position. This chapter analyzes how resilience and wellbeing develop, nurture, and strengthen school leaders through initial school preparation programs, induction programs to tenure, and ongoing professional development after tenure.

In Chapter 8, Sharlene McHolm explores the sentiments of languishing, support, and resilience in Ontario elementary school administrators shortly after their retirement. The study, detailed by the author, offers an update to a larger study of school leaders' wellbeing, workload, and emotional labor during the early stages of COVID pandemic.

In Chapter 9, Donna H. Swapp, Annette R. Walker, Fei Wang, and Katina Pollock present findings from a decolonizing study by exploring the work and wellbeing of Black school leaders in Canada and the Caribbean. They examine how Black school leaders resisted, complied, and engaged in self-care amid coloniality in their work, exposing how doing so came at the expense of these leaders' wellbeing and inviting a critical conversation to support Black school leader thriving.

Section 2 expands the focus from individual school leaders to the broader impact of leadership for teachers, students, and school communities. Here, wellbeing is conceptualized as a collective and relational outcome, shaped by leadership practices, organizational culture, and ethical commitments.

In Chapter 10, Sanam Maskey and Buddi Kumar Shrestha present findings from a qualitative study conducted with early childhood education teacher leaders in Nepal, exploring the interplay between culture and wellbeing. Their discussion of participants' perspectives on wellbeing highlights how social connectedness, belongingness, and service to the community are central to school leaders' wellbeing in collectivist contexts such as Nepal.

In Chapter 11, Sherri Humphrys and Kate Syson synthesize research from two dissertation studies to explore how school principals can intentionally foster teacher professional wellbeing within Alberta's public-school divisions. They discuss teacher-identified high-impact leadership strategies categorized into human traits, being seen and valued, and school improvement, emphasizing that principals who focus on their locus of control and build self-awareness can shift school cultures from a narrative of "illbeing" to one of organizational flourishing.